

HOW TO BE A BAD EMPEROR

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HOW TO BE A BAD EMPEROR

An Ancient Guide to Truly Terrible Leaders



Fig. 1: Caligula, a truly
bad emperor.

Suetonius

Selected, translated, and introduced by Josiah Osgood

HOW TO BE A BAD EMPEROR

ANCIENT WISDOM FOR MODERN READERS



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HOW TO BE A BAD EMPEROR



An Ancient Guide
to Truly Terrible Leaders

Suetonius

*Selected, Translated, and Introduced by
Josiah Osgood*

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INTRODUCTION

“As president in the White House, a man becomes himself, squared—his hyperself, flaws and virtues enlarged by world attention and brought to fulfillment by the nature of the work and the power, and by the inescapability of the buck that stops on the desk in the Oval Office.”¹ So journalist Lance Morrow has argued, in the introduction to a book about three American presidents, John F. Kennedy, Lyndon B. Johnson, and Richard M. Nixon. The Roman biographer Gaius Suetonius Tranquillius, though he could not have known about the White House or Oval Office, and could not have understood “the buck that stops,” would have found himself in firm agreement with Morrow’s basic point.

As the selections included in this book show, Suetonius believed that once in power, the emperors of Rome felt free to indulge their own passions and pursuits, no matter how weird or reckless. “The moment Nero became emperor,” Suetonius writes, “he summoned the lyre-player Terpnus, considered the best at the time, and for days on end sat by him after dinner as he sang late into the night.”² Little by little, Nero began to sing himself—to the horror of his domineering mother, Agrippina, and his tutor, the philosopher Seneca. Similarly, already as a schoolboy Nero had an enthusiasm for racehorses, but “in the early days of his rule” he started sneaking off to the Circus as much as possible.³ Soon enough, he wished to drive chariots himself.

Power unmasked the true identity of emperors. It brought to light quirks and vices that, as Suetonius saw, make for fascinating reading. In his biography of Tiberius, we see the emperor retreat to the beautiful and isolated isle of Capri, where it was easier to ignore public affairs and “give free rein to all of the vices that he had badly concealed for so long.”⁴ Not only does Suetonius catalogue these faults—including hard drinking, sexual perversion, and cruelty—in horrifying detail. He reveals that they were a part of Tiberius’ nature all along. Long before Tiberius became emperor, his army buddies had spotted his love of drink and joked about it. His rhetoric teacher, too, had put his finger on Tiberius’ cold, harsh nature. Even Tiberius himself, Suetonius suggests, peered into his own soul and glimpsed the

monster he would later become—or, in truth, already was.⁵

Although he was writing about emperors, Suetonius was determined to provide more than a rehashing of major historical events. He wanted readers to see what emperors were really like, in private as well as in public. So he tells the famous story of Julius Caesar's brutal murder on the Ides of March. But he also tells us about Caesar's dining habits and sex life, his physical health and appearance. Small observations matter: Caesar was always irritated by his baldness, because he could be mocked for it, and he was thrilled when he was voted the right to wear a laurel crown on all occasions. Before then, he had been forced to rely on a comb-over. Readers have fun with juicy details like these. They make Caesar seem like a real person. They also help us to grasp Caesar's arrogance and vanity, and understand how those qualities ultimately led to his catastrophic end.

The way Suetonius organized his lives helped him to avoid recreating standard histories. While he does typically start with an emperor's family background, birth, and life up to the point of gaining power, and end with the emperor's death and the omens foretelling it, the central part of each biography is organized not chronologically, but topically. In this main section, Suetonius might talk about the emperor's public policy, his games and shows, and his building projects; but also, after that, his family and friends, his sense of humor and hobbies, his religious practices, and his health, appearance, even sleep habits; and then, too, his arrogance and disrespectfulness, his cruelty, his sexual excesses, his extravagance and greed. This allowed Suetonius to showcase details that might be hard to fit into a linear narrative. Moreover, the *Lives of the Caesars* include altogether twelve emperors, beginning with Julius Caesar (Caesar's successor Augustus nowadays is more commonly regarded the true first emperor) and ending with Domitian. Thus the reader can easily compare one emperor to another, and see similarities and differences. While the bad emperors featured in this book—Julius Caesar, Tiberius, Caligula, and Nero—have much in common, Caligula emerges as far worse than Tiberius. Tiberius at least tried to hide his cruelty; Caligula wanted to flaunt it.

For all the care with which he collected and catalogued details of emperors' lives, Suetonius was not aiming for an objective presentation. He is not afraid to include what he knew were only rumors. "There was . . . a set of rumors," Suetonius writes, "that Caesar was going to move to Alexandria or Troy, taking all of the empire's money with him."⁶ Nero allowed nobody to leave the theater while he was singing, "and so some women, it is said, gave birth during his shows."⁷ Caligula loved his racehorse Incitatus so much that he gave him a house, slaves, and furniture, and "it is even said he

planned to make him consul.”⁸ Such vivid images, even when identified as hearsay, stamp themselves on reader’s minds. They are almost the equivalent of modern political cartoons.

The way Suetonius classifies information also is designed to persuade the reader. To cover first, briefly, the positive aspects of Nero’s rule and then, at far greater length, his “disgraceful and criminal acts” clearly accentuates the negative.⁹ Romans had a tendency to satirize their late emperors, and Suetonius’ comments may reflect storytellers’ efforts to one-up each other more (or less) than sober reality. In reading what follows, one is free to ask: did Tiberius endorse a man for public office because he drank six gallons of wine at a party?¹⁰ Did Caligula wear a beard made out of gold to look like Jupiter, or carry a trident as if he were Neptune? Did Nero sing through an earthquake that shook the theater he was in?¹¹ Or are these more political cartoons?

Suetonius was not making things up himself, but he may have relied on material not strictly reliable. Yet there can be little doubt that he was convinced that emperors had the ability to do both great good and great harm. Augustus, the paradigmatic good emperor of *Lives of the Caesars*, beautified Rome, improved its infrastructure, restored its religion, and promoted discipline in the army, among other accomplishments. Bad emperors, in contrast, by succumbing to vice, not only indulged themselves—they neglected the defense of the empire, they inflicted food shortages on the people of Rome, and they robbed, tortured, and murdered members of the Senate, not to mention their own relatives. They stripped others of their dignity and beat them into submission. As the bad emperor’s own personality was magnified into a grotesque “hyperself,” to use Morrow’s term, those around him risked losing their identity altogether.

An anecdote Suetonius tells about the emperor Domitian (who ruled A.D. 81–96) illustrates the biographer’s sense of imperial power.¹² Ruthless in raising money, Domitian insisted that the Jewish poll tax be enforced fully. The tax had been imposed on Jews after the Great Rebellion of 66–70, which had culminated in the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple. Suetonius recalls a man of ninety years old being hauled before the financial officer and a crowded court, where he was forced to strip, to determine if he was circumcised. If so, he would have to pay up. Thus an emperor’s decisions mattered.

Suetonius’ views were clearly shaped by his own personal experience. He was born around A.D. 70 into a wealthy family, perhaps from North Africa. His father, named Suetonius Laetus, was an equestrian—a member of the formally defined status group just below the Senate in prestige, which provided the Roman Empire with military officers and civil servants. Laetus fought as a legionary

commander for Otho, one of the men vying to be emperor after the death of Nero. Though a career in the army was open to Laetus' son too, the future biographer preferred to focus on scholarship. He produced a series of works in Greek and in Latin, now almost entirely lost, including *Roman Spectacles and Games*, *The Roman Year*, *Words of Insult*, and *Famous Prostitutes*. With the help of the Senator Pliny the Younger, he came to the attention of the emperor Trajan (who ruled 98–117) for his achievements.

It was probably Trajan who appointed Suetonius to his first positions in the imperial service as advisor on literary affairs and director of Rome's public libraries. Under Trajan's successor, Hadrian (who ruled 117–138), Suetonius rose to the important post of secretary of correspondence, in which he could observe just how much the decisions of an emperor, or his entourage, mattered. It was now that he finished and published the biography of Augustus: in it, Suetonius parades his closeness to the emperor.¹³ Later, though, Hadrian dismissed Suetonius from office, along with the head of the imperial guard, because they were more familiar with Hadrian's wife than the emperor deemed suitable. The suggestion sometimes made that Suetonius had his revenge by crafting venomous biographies of Augustus' successors seems unlikely, but the biographer's fall is a vivid testimony to the court intrigues that Suetonius believed were at the heart of imperial government. In the pages of his biographies, mistresses, wives, astrologers, physicians, slaves, and even court jesters wield power through their closeness to the emperor.



What is the purpose of gathering together Suetonius' stories of bad emperors? One answer is that they help to explain features of our own time. Our fascination with great power and with great personalities owes something to the Romans, even to the *Lives of the Caesars* in particular. Suetonius spawned many sequels in antiquity and beyond, and through translation and adaptation—including Robert Graves' famous Claudius novels—he has given us a sense that to be a Caesar is to be outsize, outrageous, out-of-this-world. It is no coincidence that one of Las Vegas' longest-running casinos is called Caesars Palace.

We are shocked by Caligula's cruel putdowns or Nero's mania for performance, but we also find their transgressions just a little bit pleasurable—find the men themselves almost entertaining. In the twenty-first century, we see better than ever how politicians can build movements around their personalities. Suetonius helps us to understand why. In giving free rein to their own desires, Caesars may tap into our hidden wishes too.¹⁴

But then they pull us up short. We see just how badly they dealt

with the challenges they faced, for the buck did stop with them. In a reversal of the usual self-help formula, *How to Be a Bad Emperor* becomes a guide to how you can be a good leader, whatever your role in life. Caesar refusing to stand to greet the Senators when they come bearing honors: a lesson in how to treat colleagues. Tiberius trying to win glory from a disastrous fire: a reminder that you shouldn't always try to take credit for your accomplishments. Caligula brutalizing those around him, even forcing his father-in-law to cut his throat with a razor: brutalize, and you will be brutalized back. Nero meeting the threat of rebellion by loading his wagons with organs for the theaters and concubines with buzz cuts: your pet projects may fatally undermine you and your organization.

Reading the *Lives of the Caesars* from cover to cover can be daunting, so many details are included. The stories of the bad emperors and the weird worlds they constructed make for an entertaining selection. They are also a meditation on how the acquisition of power may not so much corrupt, as the old adage has it, as allow our own worst qualities to slide out and harm us. Unrestrained power may be thrilling, but in the end proves ineffective.

HOW TO BE A BAD EMPEROR

Divus Iulius

IGNORE BAD OMENS . . . AND YOUR WIFE

Julius Caesar (100–44 B.C.)

While modern historians typically regard Augustus as Rome's first emperor, Suetonius begins with Julius Caesar. Caesar, as he saw, did not just provide a name for his successors, along with some key precedents. His abuse of power was an anticipation of problems to come.

As Suetonius writes, Caesar was a gifted general. A superb horseman, he was always on the move, bareheaded in sun and rain alike. He could cover vast distances at incredible speed. If it suited him, he would join battle immediately after a march, even in bad weather. And if any of his soldiers started fleeing, he would grab them by the throat and force them back into the fray. He judged them purely by their fight record—not their social standing or morals.

For all his toughness, though, he was vain. He kept his head carefully trimmed and shaved—and was accused of depilating certain other parts of his body that were hairy too. Nothing in life distressed him more than his baldness. Of all the honors he received, the right to wear a laurel crown pleased him most: he took advantage of it on every occasion.

Caesar had to be the best at everything—fighting, writing, even making love. His entire life he was a boaster. At his aunt's funeral, as a young man, he bragged of his descent from gods and kings. After a battle in the civil war he initiated in 49 B.C. by illegally crossing the Rubicon River into Italy, he proclaimed "I came, I saw, I conquered."

In the following selection Suetonius describes how Caesar's arrogance brought him down. His outrageous remarks and shoddy treatment of senatorial colleagues stirred up deadly feelings of hatred, and his supreme self-confidence blinded him to signs of trouble, including clearly alarming omens. A modern reader might dismiss much of Suetonius' account as superstition. But "Beware the Ides of March" remains a warning today for leaders about the danger of ignoring advice.

76. Yet others things he said and did tip the scales, leading to the judgment that he abused his power and was justly killed. It was not just that he accepted excessive honors: a continuous consulship, the dictatorship for life, and the censorship of morals, as well as the first name "Imperator," the surname "Father of his Country," a statue among the kings, and a raised seat in the theater. He also allowed honors to be awarded to him that were too great for any human being: a golden throne in the Senate-house and in front of the speaker's platform; a wagon and litter for processions in the Circus; temples; altars; statues next to those of the gods; a cushioned couch; a *flamen*; priests for the Lupercalia; the naming of a month for him.¹ Indeed, there were no honors he did not receive, or bestow, as he liked.

(2) He held his third and fourth consulships in name only, content with the power of dictator decreed at the same time as the consulships. Furthermore, in both of those years for the last three months he substituted two consuls for himself. The result was that during this period, he held elections only for the tribunes and the aediles. To administer affairs in the city of Rome in his absence, he appointed praetorian prefects. When a consul suddenly died on the last day of the year, however, he did give the vacant office for a few hours to a man who sought it.

(3) With equal presumption he broke with tradition and arranged the magistrates for several years in advance, gave consular insignia to ten praetors, and admitted into the Senate men who had just been granted citizenship, including even some half-civilized Gauls. He also put his own household slaves in charge of the mint and state revenues and he entrusted the supervision and command of the three legions that he had left in Alexandria to Rufio, a male prostitute who was the son of a freedman of his.

77. Just as outrageous were remarks that he made in public, which Titus Ampius notes: "The republic is nothing, a name only, without body or shape. Sulla did not know his ABCs, seeing as he gave up the dictatorship. Men ought to speak more carefully with me now and treat what I say as law." He reached such a point of arrogance that once, when a soothsayer reported that the entrails were unfavorable and lacked a heart, Caesar said: "They will be more favorable, when I wish it; and besides, an animal lacking a heart should not be considered a bad omen!"

78. But it was through the following action especially that he stirred up deep and deadly feelings of hatred toward himself. When the senators as a body came to him with many highly honorific decrees, he received them in front of the Temple of Venus Genetrix without rising. Some believe that he tried to get up and was held back by Cornelius Balbus, others that he made no such effort but in fact

looked scornfully at Gaius Trebatius, who urged him to stand.

(2) This deed of Caesar seemed all the more intolerable because of an incident that happened at one of his triumphs. He was riding past the benches of the tribunes, and when Pontius Aquila, a member of the college, did not stand up, Caesar cried out in anger: "Well tribune Aquila, take back the republic from me!"² For several days he would not promise anything to anyone without adding the caveat, "Provided, of course, Pontius Aquila allows it."

79. To this insult, which made his contempt for the Senate so clear, he added an act of even greater arrogance. It happened when he was returning from the Latin festival. Amid extravagant and unprecedented cheers of the people, a man from the crowd placed on a statue of Caesar a laurel crown, with a white ribbon tied to it.³ When the tribunes Epidius Marullus and Caesetius Flavus ordered the ribbon removed from the crown and the man imprisoned, Caesar attacked the tribunes harshly and deprived them of power. He was upset either that the mention of kingship had come off so poorly or, as he claimed, that the glory of refusing it had been snatched away from him.

(2) After this he was not able to shake off the odium of having sought the title of king. To be sure, when the people greeted him as king, he replied that he was Caesar, not king. And when, during the Lupercalia, the consul Antonius a number of times placed a crown on the head of Caesar, as he sat on the speaker's platform, Caesar rejected it and sent it to the Capitol as an offering for Jupiter Greatest and Best.⁴

(3) There even was a set of rumors circulating that Caesar was going to move to Alexandria or Troy, taking all of the empire's money with him, draining Italy by levies, and leaving oversight of Rome to his friends; moreover, at the next meeting of the Senate, Lucius Cotta, the quindecimvir, would recommend that since it was stated in the prophetic books that the Parthians could only be conquered by a king, Caesar should be called king.⁵

80. It was for this reason the conspirators sped up their plans, so they would not have to give their assent to this proposal.

And so plots which previously had formed sporadically, involving two or three men at a time, all came together into one. Even the people were unhappy with the way things were, and both privately and publicly attacked Caesar's tyranny and called for champions of their liberty. (2) After some foreigners were made members of the Senate, a sign was posted: "For the good of Rome—let no one offer to show a new senator to the Senate-house!"

These verses also were frequently sung:

Caesar marched the Gauls in triumph,

then into the Senate-house.
Then the Gauls took off their trousers,
and put on the purple stripe.⁶

When Quintus Maximus, appointed consul in Caesar's place for three months, entered the theater and the lictor ordered that he be recognized in the traditional way, everyone cried out: "He's no consul!"

(3) After Caesetius and Marullus were removed as tribunes, at the next election they received a number of votes for the consulship.

Some wrote on a statue of Lucius Brutus: "If only you were still alive!" And on a statue of Caesar himself:

Brutus was our founding consul, since he
drove the kings from Rome.
Now since this man drove out consuls,
he at last became a king.

(4) More than sixty men took part in the conspiracy against him, with Gaius Cassius and Marcus and Decimus Brutus taking the lead.⁷ They hesitated at first whether to form two groups at the elections in the Field of Mars (when Caesar would call the tribes to vote), with some throwing him from the voting bridge, while others waited below to stab him; or to attack him on the Sacred Way or at the entrance to the theater. But after a meeting was called for the Ides of March in the Hall of Pompey, it was an easy choice to go with that time and place.⁸

81. There were clear signs that made Caesar's murder known in advance. A few months before, settlers established by the Julian law in the colony of Capua were demolishing some very old tombs so that they could build their farmhouses. They were doing this all the more eagerly because, in examining the remains, they found a considerable number of vases of ancient craftsmanship. In the monument said to have been that of Capys, the founder of Capua, a bronze tablet was discovered, written with Greek letters and words to this effect: "Whenever the bones of Capys are found, a descendant of his will be killed by a band of kinsmen and then will be avenged by great disasters for Italy."⁹ (2) Nobody should think this is unhistorical or made up, as Cornelius Balbus, a very close friend of Caesar, is the source.

A few days before his death, Caesar learned that the flocks of horses which he had dedicated when he crossed the Rubicon River and allowed to wander around without a guard were stubbornly refusing to eat and were weeping profusely. The soothsayer Spurinna also warned him, as he sacrificed, that he should beware a danger that would make its appearance no later than the Ides of March. (3) On the day before the Ides, a wren flew into the Hall of Pompey with a sprig

of laurel branch; a flock of different types of birds from a nearby grove followed it and tore it apart there.¹⁰

Moreover, the night before his murder, Caesar himself dreamt that first he was flying through the sky above the clouds, then shaking hands with Jupiter. His wife Calpurnia thought that the pediment of their house was collapsing and her husband was being stabbed in her lap. And all of a sudden, the door of their bedroom even flew open spontaneously.

(4) Because of these things and because of his poor health, Caesar hesitated a long time whether he should stay at home and postpone the business he had planned to conduct in the Senate. Finally, Decimus Brutus urged him that he should not let down men who had been gathered a long time waiting, and, shortly before noon, Caesar set out. When a letter describing the plot was given to him by somebody on the way, Caesar added it to the others that he held in his left hand, planning to read it later.

Then, after many victims had been killed in sacrifice, though he could not obtain favorable auspices, he entered the Hall anyway, rejecting religious procedure. He laughed at Spurinna and accused him of being mistaken: the Ides of March had come without any harm. Spurinna said that while they had indeed come, they had not yet passed.

82. As Caesar sat, the conspirators stood around him, pretending to pay their respects. Cimber Tillius, who had been assigned the lead role, drew closer to Caesar, as if to ask him something. When Caesar shook his head and signaled with a gesture that he would deal with the matter at another time, Cimber grabbed his toga at both shoulders.

“This is violence!” Caesar shouted, as one of the two Cascas stabbed him from behind, a little below his throat. (2) Caesar grabbed the arm of Casca, thrust his writing stylus through it, tried to jump up, but was then slowed down by another wound. When he realized that daggers were drawn and he was being attacked on all sides, he covered his head with his toga while also drawing its folds down to his ankles with his left hand. This way he would die more honorably, with the lower part of his body covered.

And so he was stabbed with twenty-three wounds, letting out only a single groan, without any words, at the first blow—even if some have related that, as Marcus Brutus rushed at him, he said: “You too, my child?”¹¹ (3) Everyone ran away and he lay there lifeless for some time until, placed on a litter, with one arm hanging off the side, he was carried home by three ordinary slaves. In the view of the doctor Antistius, among so many wounds, none was found to be fatal except the one Caesar took second in his chest. (*Divine Julius* 76–82.3)

76. Praegrauant tamen cetera facta dictaque eius, ut et abusus dominatione et iure caesus existimetur. non enim honores modo nimios recepit: continuum consulatum, perpetuam dictaturam praefecturamque morum, insuper praenomen Imperatoris, cognomen Patris patriae, statuum inter reges, suggestum in orchestra; sed et ampliora etiam humano fastigio decerni sibi passus est: sedem auream in curia et pro tribunali, tensam et ferculum circensi pompa, templa, aras, simulacra iuxta deos, puluinar, flaminem, lupercos, appellationem mensis e suo nomine; ac nullos non honores ad libidinem cepit et dedit. (2) tertium et quartum consulatum titulo tenus gessit contentus dictaturae potestate decretae cum consulatibus simul atque utroque anno binos consules substituit sibi in ternos nouissimos menses, ita ut medio tempore comitia nulla habuerit praeter tribunorum et aedilium plebis praefectosque pro praetoribus constituerit, qui absente se res urbanas administrarent. pridie autem Kalendas Ianuarias repentina consulis morte cessantem honorem in paucas horas petenti dedit. (3) eadem licentia spreto patrio more magistratus in pluris annos ordinauit, decem praetoris uiris consularia ornamenta tribuit, ciuitate donatos et quosdam e semibarbaris Gallorum recepit in curiam. praeterea monetae publicisque uestigalibus peculiares seruos praeposuit. trium legionum, quas Alexandreae relinquebat, curam et imperium Rufioni liberti sui filio exoleto suo demandauit.

77. nec minoris inpotentiae uoces propalam edebat, ut Titus Amp[r]ius scribit: nihil esse rem publicam, appellationem modo sine corpore ac specie. Sullam nescisse litteras, qui dictaturam deposuerit. debere homines consideratius iam loqui secum ac pro legibus habere quae dicat. eoque arrogantiae progressus est, ut haruspice tristia et sine corde exta quondam nuntiante futura diceret laetiora, cum uellet; nec pro ostento ducendum, si pecudi cor defuisset.

78. Verum praecipuam et exitiabilem sibi inuidiam hinc maxime mouit. adeuntis se cum plurimis honorificentissimisque decretis uniuersos patres conscriptos sedens pro aede Veneris Genetricis excepit. quidam putant retentum a Cornelio Balbo, cum conaretur assurgere; alii, ne conatum quidem omnino, sed etiam admonentem Gaium Trebatium ut assurgeret minus familiari uultu respexisse. (2) idque factum eius tanto intolerabilius est uisum, quod ipse triumphanti et subsellia tribunicia praeteruehenti sibi unum e collegio Pontium Aquilam non assurrexisse adeo indignatus sit, ut proclamauerit: “repete ergo a me Aquila rem publicam tribunus!” et nec destiterit per continuos dies quicquam cuiquam nisi sub exceptione polliceri: “si tamen per Pontium Aquilam licuerit.”

79. adiecit ad tam insignem despecti senatus contumeliam multo arrogantius factum. nam cum in sacrificio Latinarum reuertente eo

inter inmodicas ac nouas populi acclamationes quidam e turba statuæ eius coronam lauream candida fascia praeligata inposuisset et tribuni plebis Epidius Marullus Caesetiusque Flauus coronæ fasciam detrahi hominemque duci in uincula iussissent, dolens seu parum prospere motam regni mentionem siue, ut ferebat, ereptam sibi gloriam recusandi, tribunos grauitè increpitos potestate priuauit. (2) neque ex eo infamiam affectati etiam regii nominis discutere ualuit, quanquam et plebei regem se salutanti Caesarem se, non regem esse responderit et Lupercalibus pro rostris a consule Antonio admotum saepius capiti suo diadema reppulerit atque in Capitolium Ioui Optimo Maximo miserit. (3) quin etiam uaria fama percebruit migraturum Alexandream uel Ilium, translatis simul opibus imperii exhaustaque Italia dilectibus et procuratione urbis amicis permissa, proximo autem senatu Lucium Cottam quindecimuirum sententiam dicturum, ut, quoniam fatalibus libris contineretur Parthos nisi a rege non posse uinci, Caesar rex appellaretur.

80. quæ causa coniuratis maturandi fuit destinata negotia, ne assentiri necesse esset.

Consilia igitur dispersim antea habita et quæ sæpe bini terniue ceperant, in unum omnes contulerunt, ne populo quidem iam praesenti statu laeto, sed clam palamque detrectante dominationem atque assertores flagitante. (2) peregrinis in senatum allectis libellus propositus est: “Bonum factum: ne quis senatori nouo curiam monstrare uelit!” et illa uulgo canebantur:

Gallos Caesar in triumphum ducit, idem
in curiam:

Galli bracas deposuerunt, latum clauum
sumpserunt.

Quinto Maximo suffecto trimenstrique consule theatrum introeunte, cum lictor animaduerti ex more iussisset, ab uniuersis conclamatum est non esse eum consulem. (3) post remotos Caesetium et Marullum tribunos reperta sunt proximis comitiis complura suffragia consules eos declarantium. subscripsere quidam Luci Bruti statuæ: “utinam uiueres!” item ipsius Caesaris:

Brutus, quia reges eiecit, consul primus
factus est:

hic, quia consules eiecit, rex postremo
factus est.

(4) conspiratum est in eum a sexaginta amplius, Gaio Cassio Marcoque et Decimo Bruto principibus conspiracyonis. qui primum cunctati utrumne in Campo per comitia tribus ad suffragia uocantem partibus diuisis e ponte deicerent atque exceptum trucidarent, an in Sacra uia uel in aditu theatri adorirentur, postquam senatus Idibus Martiis in

Pompei curiam edictus est, facile tempus et locum praetulerunt.

81. Sed Caesari futura caedes euidentibus prodigiis denuntiata est. paucos ante menses, cum in colonia Capua deducti lege Iulia coloni ad extruendas uillas uetustissima sepulcra dis[s]icerent idque eo studiosius facerent, quod aliquantum uasculorum operis antiqui scrutantes reperiebant, tabula aenea in monimento, in quo dicebatur Capys conditor Capuae sepultus, inuenta est conscripta litteris uerbisque Graecis hac sententia: quandoque ossa Capyis detecta essent, fore ut illo prognatus manu consanguineorum necaretur magnisque mox Italiae cladibus uindicaretur. (2) cuius rei, ne quis fabulosam aut commenticiam putet, auctor est Cornelius Balbus, familiarissimus Caesaris. proximis diebus equorum greges, quos in traiciendo Rubiconi flumini consecrarat ac uagos et sine custode dimiserat, comperit pertinacissime pabulo abstinere ubertimque flere. et immolantem haruspex Spurinna monuit, caueret periculum, quod non ultra Martias Idus proferretur. (3) pridie autem easdem Idus auem regaliolum cum laureo ramulo Pompeianae curiae se inferentem uolucres uarii generis ex proximo nemore persecutae ibidem discerpserunt. ea uero nocte, cui inluxit dies caedis, et ipse sibi uisus est per quietem interdum supra nubes uolitare, alias cum Ioue dextram iungere; et Calpurnia uxor imaginata est conlabi fastigium domus maritumque in gremio suo confodi; ac subito cubiculi fores sponte patuerunt.

(4) Ob haec simul et ob infirmam ualitudinem diu cunctatus an se contineret et quae apud senatum proposuerat agere differret, tandem Decimo Bruto adhortante, ne frequentis ac iam dudum opperientis destitueret, quinta fere hora progressus est libellumque insidiarum indicem ab obuio quodam porrectum libellis ceteris, quos sinistra manu tenebat, quasi mox lecturus commiscuit. dein pluribus hostiis caesis, cum litare non posset, introiit curiam sprete religione Spurrinamque irridens et ut falsum arguens, quod sine ulla sua noxa Idus Martiae adessent: quanquam is uenisse quidem eas diceret, sed non praeterisse.

82. assidentem conspirati specie officii circumsteterunt, ilicoque Cimber Tillius, qui primas partes susceperat, quasi aliquid rogaturus propius accessit renuentique et gestu[m] in aliud tempus differenti ab utroque umero togam adprehendit: deinde clamantem: "ista quidem uis est!" alter e Cascis auersum uulnerat paulum infra iugulum. (2) Caesar Cascae brachium arreptum graphio traiecit conatusque prosilire alio uulnere tardatus est; utque animaduertit undique se strictis pugionibus peti, toga caput obuoluit, simul sinistra manu sinum ad ima crura deduxit, quo honestius caderet etiam inferiore corporis parte uelata. atque ita tribus et uiginti plagis confossus est uno modo ad primum ictum gemitu sine uoce edito, etsi tradiderunt

quidam Marco Bruto irruenti dixisse: καὶ σὺ τέκνον; (3) exanimis diffugientibus cunctis aliquamdiu iacuit, donec lecticae impositum, dependente brachio, tres seruoli domum rettulerunt. nec in tot uulneribus, ut Antistius medicus existimabat, letale ullum repertum est, nisi quod secundo loco in pectore acceperat.

Tiberius

SPEND ALL YOUR TIME AT YOUR RESORT

Tiberius (42 B.C.–A.D. 37)

This chapter features a lengthy segment from the life of Tiberius (who became emperor in A.D. 14) that details the emperor's vices—including hard drinking, sexual perversion, and cruelty. Many of the stories are set on the isle of Capri, the beautiful and isolated spot where Tiberius spent most of the last decade of his life, neglecting his public duties in Rome.

Tiberius was the son of Augustus' third wife, the formidable Livia Drusilla. While Augustus hoped an heir of his own blood might succeed him, he ultimately was forced to adopt Tiberius in A.D. 4 and give him the name of Caesar.

Augustus clearly had reservations about his stepson. A consummate aristocrat, Tiberius was a capable general but he loathed the day-to-day politics of Rome. He had little time for the religious festivals or games of the city. He spent almost nothing on public buildings. Though a handsome man with broad shoulders and chest, he was constantly frowning and spoke only reluctantly and with great severity. "Let them hate me, so long as they accept!" Suetonius quotes him as saying.

Frustrated by the duties Augustus piled on him, years before his adoption he had sailed off to the isle of Rhodes in a huff. His retreat to Capri in A.D. 26 may similarly have been the result of what he saw as an unbearable situation. But according to Suetonius, what the secluded island really offered Tiberius was the chance to give free rein to the vices that he had long—and not entirely successfully—concealed. This biography is a warning of how immense power can draw out the very worst qualities in a human being.

38. For two whole years after he became emperor, he did not set foot outside the city gates. After that, he never was gone except for trips to nearby towns—Antium being the farthest—and this was quite rare and only for a few days. Yet often he announced that he would go back to see the provinces and the armies and nearly every year he prepared an expedition, obtaining vehicles, arranging provisions in the towns and colonies, finally allowing prayers to be made for his departure and return. As a result, people jokingly called him Callippides, a man known from a Greek proverb for running around a lot yet not advancing much more than a foot.

39. But after having lost both of his sons—Germanicus died in Syria, Drusus in Rome—he sought refuge in Campania.¹ Almost everyone kept thinking and saying that he never would return and that he even would die soon. Both things pretty nearly came true: he did not return to Rome again, and just a few days after he left, near Tarracina, in a residence known as “The Cave,” a number of large rocks accidentally fell from above as he was dining. Though many of the guests and servers were struck, he unexpectedly escaped.

40. He traveled through Campania and, once he had dedicated the Capitolium at Capua and the Temple of Augustus at Nola—the stated reason for the journey—he went to Capri. He took particular pleasure in the island because it was approached by a single, small shore and was protected on all sides by precipitous rocks of immense height and by deep water. But the people at once asked him to come back, continually begging because of the disaster at Fidenae in which over 20,000 men died in the collapse of an amphitheater during a gladiatorial show. He crossed over to the mainland and granted everyone the opportunity to see him. People were all the more amazed because, upon leaving the city, he had decreed that nobody should disturb him and, during his whole journey, he had cleared from his path everyone coming to see him.

41. Returning to the island, he gave up his concern for public affairs. He never afterward brought to full strength the equestrian jury pools; he did not replace any of the tribunes of the soldiers, the prefects, or the provincial governors; he left Spain and Syria for a number of years without consular governors; he let Armenia be overrun by the Parthians, Moesia laid waste by the Dacians and Sarmatians, the Gallic provinces by the Germans. The dishonor to the empire was as great as the danger.

42. Moreover, now that he had gained the freedom offered by seclusion, it was as if the public had turned their eyes away. He at once gave free rein to all of the vices that he had badly concealed for so long. I will go through these one by one from the beginning.

When still a newly recruited soldier in camp, because of his

excessive fondness for wine he was called “Biberius” instead of Tiberius, “Caldius” instead of Claudius, and “Mero” instead of Nero.² Later, as emperor, right in the midst of his efforts to improve public morals he spent a night and two whole days feasting and drinking with Pomponius Flaccus and Lucius Piso. He immediately afterward gave one of them the province of Syria, the other the prefecture of Rome, and even stated in his letters of appointment that these men were the best company, fit for *all* occasions.

(2) Then there was Cestius Gallus, a lecherous and wasteful old man, once censured by Augustus. Tiberius, after reproaching him in the Senate, a few days later agreed to have dinner with him on this condition: Cestius should not change or omit any of his usual practices, and at the dinner they should be served by naked girls.

Tiberius favored a completely obscure candidate for the quaestorship over men of the noblest families because, when Tiberius proposed a drinking challenge at a dinner, the man drained an amphora of wine. He gave 200,000 sesterces to Asellius Sabinus, in recognition of a dialogue that staged a contest between a mushroom, a fig-pecker, an oyster, and a thrush.³ Finally, he created the new office of minister of pleasures and put the equestrian Titus Caesonius Priscus in charge.

43. In the seclusion of Capri he also devised “privies,” a place for his secret desires. Bands of female and male prostitutes and the originators of unnatural intercourse whom he called “squeezers” joined up in threes and took turns debauching themselves in front of him, to arouse his flagging appetite for sex.

(2) He decorated his bedrooms with a wide arrangement of paintings and statuettes showing the most risqué scenes and subjects. He also equipped them with the books of Elephantis so that when a service was offered, an illustration of the required position would be available.⁴ In addition, he contrived “spots for Venus” throughout the woods and glades and had boys and girls, dressed up as satyrs and nymphs, working as prostitutes in caves and grottoes. People openly referred to it all as “the Old Goat’s Home,” playing on the name of the island.⁵

44. Tiberius acquired greater and more shameful notoriety yet for something that can barely be mentioned or heard mentioned, much less believed. While he swam, he had boys of a tender young age—he called them “fishies”—pass between his thighs and make a game of going after him with licks and bites. He also took babies who were somewhat grown but still weaning and placed them to his groin as if it were a breast: this form of gratification suited him better because of both his natural inclinations and his age. (2) For the same reason, when a painting by Parrasius that showed Atalanta orally gratifying

Meleager was bequeathed to Tiberius on condition that if he were offended by the subject he could take 1,000,000 sesterces instead, not only did he prefer the painting, he put it on display in his bedroom.

It is even reported that once when he was sacrificing, he was so taken by the appearance of the attendant carrying the incense box that he could not stop himself, the moment the ceremony was over, from leading the boy off and raping him, along with his brother, a flute-player. Later, when they jointly reproached him for this appalling deed, he broke their legs.

45. He took great pleasure in oral sex with women, and respectable women at that, as was clearly shown by the death of a certain Mallonia. Summoned to his bed, she resolutely refused to endure anything more and so he turned her over to the informers. Even during her trial, he would not stop interrupting her and kept asking if she really had any regrets, until finally she left the court, ran home, and stabbed herself, loudly reproaching the hairy and stinky old man for his foul mouth. This gave rise to a line in an Atellane farce at the next games that got lots of applause and became widely known: "The little old he-goat licks the she-goats' parts."

46. He spent little and was tightfisted. To the men who accompanied him on his foreign tours or military campaigns he never gave a salary, only food. Just once did he show generosity—and then it was through the gift of his stepfather Augustus. He created three classes based on each man's rank, and gave to the first 600,000 sesterces; to the second 300,000; and to the third, which he called not his friends but the Greeks, 200,000.

47. As emperor, he did not build any structures of splendor. The only ones that he did undertake—a temple of Augustus and a restoration of the Theater of Pompey—he left unfinished after many years. Nor did he put on any shows, and those that were put on by somebody else he rarely attended so that nothing would be demanded of him—especially after he had been forced to manumit the comic actor Actius.

Having provided assistance to a few senators who lacked means, to avoid having to furnish aid to more, he refused to help others unless they demonstrated to the Senate good reasons for their hardship. Thus, through their sense of dignity and shame, he stopped most from asking, including Hortalus, grandson of the orator Quintus Hortensius, who though of very limited means had raised four children at the urging of Augustus.

48. Just twice did he show generosity to the people, once when he offered a loan for the sum of 100,000,000 sesterces for three years without interest, and a second time when he reimbursed some owners of apartments that had burned down on the Caelian Hill. The first of

these acts was forced on him by the people's demand for help during a currency crisis. Tiberius had prescribed through a decree of the Senate that moneylenders invest two-thirds of their holdings in land and debtors pay at once the same amount of debt—but this did not resolve the problem. The second act was to relieve temporary misery, yet he so valued his generosity here that he ordered the Caelian Hill to have its name changed to the Augustan Hill.

(2) To the army, after doubling the bequests Augustus left in his will, Tiberius never showed generosity. The only exceptions were the 4,000 sesterces he paid to each of the praetorians, because they had not lent their support to Sejanus, and certain gifts to the Syrian legions, because they alone had not worshipped the statue of Sejanus among their standards.⁶ Moreover, he discharged veterans extremely rarely, seeking their death from old age, and savings from their death. The provinces received no financial support from him, except for Asia, after its cities were destroyed by an earthquake.

49. Then, as time wore on, he turned to forcible expropriations. The following is widely agreed upon. Gnaeus Lentulus the augur, who had a very large fortune, was driven by Tiberius through fear and apprehension to take his life and leave the emperor as his sole heir. Lepida, a woman of noble birth, was condemned to please Quirinus, an exceedingly rich ex-consul without children who divorced her and then, twenty years later, accused her of once trying to poison him. (2) Leading men of the Gauls, the Spains, Syria, and Greece had their fortunes confiscated on a flimsy and shameless set of charges; against some the accusation was nothing more than that they held part of their wealth in cash. Many communities and individuals were deprived of old exemptions and the right of mining and of collecting duties. The Parthian king Vonones, driven out by his people and thinking he had Rome's protection, took refuge in Antioch with a great treasure and was treacherously robbed and killed.

50. Tiberius showed his hatred for family members first with his brother Drusus, disclosing a letter in which Drusus pleaded with him to force Augustus to restore freedom. Then came the others. To his wife Julia, after her exile, he was so opposed to showing any kindness or affection—the least one might expect—that he forbade her, already confined to one town by decree of her father, to leave her house or enjoy any human company. He also deprived her of the property her father let her have and her yearly allowance—on a legal pretext, namely that Augustus had made no provision about these matters in his will.

(2) Annoyed with his mother Livia for demanding a share in power equal to his, he avoided regular contact with her as well as lengthy and private conversations. He did not want to seem controlled by her

views—on which, nevertheless, every now and then he did rely. He also was highly indignant when the Senate moved that, in addition to the “son of Augustus” he be named “the son of Livia” in inscriptions. (3) For this reason, he would not allow her to be called “Parent of Her Country” or to receive publicly any special honor. He also frequently warned her to stay out of important matters that did not concern a woman, especially after he noticed that at a fire by the Temple of Vesta she had personally stepped in and urged the people and the soldiers to help more vigorously (she had been in habit of doing this under Augustus).

51. Afterward he reached the point of actual enmity toward her, for the following reason they say. When she kept pressing him to appoint a man who had not been born a citizen to the equestrian jury pools, he said he would make the appointment only if he were allowed to have it entered in the album that his had been extorted from him by his mother. Enraged, she took out of the shrine where they were kept some old letters from Augustus to her about Tiberius’ nastiness and insufferable character and she read them aloud. He was so upset that these had been kept so long and were used against him in such a hostile way that some people think that, among the causes for his retirement, this was the most important one. (2) Certainly during the three whole years in which he was gone from Rome while his mother still lived, he saw her only once, and it was for no more than a couple of hours on a single day. And then, when she was ill, he did not arrange to be there. After she died, there was a delay for several days while he held out hope that he was coming, until finally, her body decomposing and rotting, she was buried. He kept her from being deified, claiming that this was in keeping with her instructions. At the same time, he considered her will null and void and within a short time brought ruin upon all of her friends and companions, even those she had asked on her deathbed to arrange her funeral. One of them, a man of the equestrian order, was even condemned to the treadmill.

52. He loved neither his natural son Drusus nor his adopted son Germanicus with a father’s affection, hating the virtues of the one, the faults of the other (for Drusus’ lifestyle was rather loose and relaxed). And so, even when Drusus died, Tiberius was not particularly affected but went back to his ordinary routine almost as soon as the funeral ended. A longer period of mourning was forbidden. (2) Even when envoys from Troy came a little later offering condolences, he smiled, as if the memory of his grief were already gone, and replied that he grieved on their account too, because they had lost their distinguished fellow citizen Hector.

He maliciously criticized Germanicus, dismissing his splendid

deeds as a waste of time and attacking his glorious victories as harmful to the state. Furthermore, he complained in the Senate that Germanicus had gone to Alexandria because of a sudden, massive food shortage without consulting him. (3) Tiberius is even believed to have caused Germanicus' death, acting through Gnaeus Piso, the governor of Syria. Some believe that Piso, on trial for the crime, was going to produce these orders—except that when he secretly showed them, Tiberius took them away and arranged for him to be killed. This is why “Bring back Germanicus!” was written up everywhere and shouted out constantly during the night. Tiberius himself added to the suspicion when, afterward, he cruelly brought down the wife and children of Germanicus too.

53. When his daughter-in-law Agrippina was a little too outspoken in her complaints after the death of her husband, he grabbed her by the hand and quoted the Greek verse: “Dear child, if you don’t rule, do you think you’ve been wronged?” After that, he did not even deign to speak to her. Indeed, after he once offered her an apple at dinner and she dared not taste it, he stopped inviting her to meals, pretending that he was being accused of poisoning her. In fact, the situation had been deliberately set up—his offering the apple as a test and her refusing it on the grounds that it was sure to kill her. (2) He ultimately accused her of planning to take refuge, first at a statue of Augustus, then with the armies, and he banished her to Pandataria. When she hurled abuse at him, he had a centurion flog her and one of her eyes gouged out. When she resolved to starve herself to death, he had her mouth pried open violently and ordered food to be crammed in. And when she persisted and died as a result, he railed on about her, urging that her birthday should be counted as one of the unholy days. He even considered it to his credit that he had not strangled her with a rope and thrown her to the Steps of Mourning. In recognition of such an act of clemency, he allowed a decree to be passed that thanked him and dedicated a gift of gold to Capitoline Jupiter.

54. Even when deprived of his two sons, he had three grandsons from Germanicus, named Nero, Drusus, and Gaius; and one from Drusus, named Tiberius. He recommended the eldest boys of Germanicus, Nero and Drusus, to the Senators and celebrated their coming-of-age ceremonies with a gift to the people. But when he found out, at the start of the new year, that vows had been undertaken publicly for their wellbeing, in addition to his, he pleaded with the Senate that such benefits ought only to be extended to men who were experienced and older. (2) With his inner feelings fully exposed from that time on, he left the boys open to accusations from all sides and, by a variety of tricks, caused them to attack him and so to betray themselves. Tiberius accused them in a letter in which he heaped up

the insults, and after both were judged public enemies, he starved them to death, Nero on the island of Pontia, Drusus in the lowest part of the Palatine. It is thought that Nero was driven to suicide when an executioner, pretending to have come by authority of the Senate, presented him with nooses and hooks, while Drusus had his food reduced so much that he tried to eat the stuffing of a cushion. The remains of both were so scattered that only with difficulty could they be gathered.⁷

55. In addition to his old friends and close associates, he had demanded that twenty leading members of the state serve as his advisors on public affairs. Out of the whole group, he hardly left two or three unscathed and the rest he destroyed for one reason or another, including Aelius Sejanus, who fell with a great many others. Tiberius had raised this man to the height of power not so much out of warm feelings as to have his services and wiles to do away with the children of Germanicus and secure the succession for Tiberius' own natural grandson, the son of his son Drusus.

56. He showed no more mercy to his Greek companions, upon whom he lavished much attention. A certain Xeno was holding forth in rather precious language and was asked by Tiberius what that painful dialect was. "Doric," he answered, and Tiberius banished him to Cinara, believing that this was a criticism of his earlier retirement, since on Rhodes they speak Doric.⁸ Tiberius was in the habit, too, of posing questions over dinner derived from his day's reading. Seleucus, a grammarian, had been grilling Tiberius' attendants on which authors the emperor was working on and so came prepared; upon finding this out, Tiberius first banished him from his circle and then also drove him to death.

57. Not even in boyhood was Tiberius' cold, harsh nature concealed. Theodorus of Gadara, his rhetoric teacher, seemed to be the first both to see it fully and to capture it in a most fitting comparison when, scolding Tiberius from time to time, he called him "mud, kneaded with blood."

But his nature revealed itself considerably more after he became emperor, even in the early days when he was still trying to gain people's favor by a pretense of moderation. (2) As a funeral was passing by and some smart aleck loudly instructed the corpse to tell Augustus that his legacies to the people had not been paid out, Tiberius had the man dragged to him and ordered that he be given what he was owed: to be led off to execution so he could tell the truth to Augustus.

Not long afterward, an equestrian named Pompeius was refusing to do something in the Senate. Tiberius threatened to clap him into chains and swore that he would make a Pompeian out of Pompeius. It

was a cruel pun on the name of the man and the fate of the old party.⁹

58. Around the same time, when a praetor asked whether Tiberius was ordering trials for treason to be convened, he replied that the laws must be enforced, and enforce them he did, savagely. One man had removed the head of Augustus from a statue so that he could place another one on. The trial was heard in the Senate, and since there was some uncertainty, evidence was obtained by torture. After the defendant was convicted, this sort of accusation gradually reached the point that even the following were capital offenses: to beat a slave, or change one's clothes, near a statue of Augustus; to bring a coin or ring with Augustus' likeness into a latrine or brothel; to criticize any word or deed of Augustus. Ultimately, even a man who allowed an honor to be decreed to himself in his colony on the same day on which honors had once been decreed to Augustus was put to death.

59. Tiberius committed many cruel and savage deeds, under the guise of strictness and improving morals—but really in keeping with his own nature. Some men had recourse to poetry to criticize the times they were living in and to warn about those to come:

O cruel and savage man, do you want me
to say it all briefly?

I'll be damned forever, if your mother is
able to love you!

You are no knight, how can I tell? You
lack the hundred thousands.

And if you really want to know, Rhodes
is a place of exile.

O Caesar, you have modified the golden
age of Saturn.

For as long as you shall live, it always
will be iron.

He has no taste for any wine, since now
he thirsts for blood,

For this he gulps as eagerly as once he
gulped hard drink.

(2) Look, Romulus, at Sulla's luck: 'twas
luck for him not you.

And if you will, take Marius too, but
after his return.

And then there is Antonius, fomenting
civil wars:

Look at his hands, stained more than
once with blood of citizens.

And say: the end of Rome is nigh! For he
who was exiled,

And then comes back acquiring rule, he

At first, he wanted these to be taken as the compositions of those who could not stand his reforms and who spoke less in candor than out of anger and annoyance, and he would say again and again: "Let them hate me, so long as they accept!" But later he himself proved that these things were clearly true and beyond dispute.

60. A few days after he came to Capri and was keeping to himself, a fisherman unexpectedly brought him a mullet.¹⁰ Terrified, because the man had snuck up on him from the back of the island on rugged ground that lacked trails, Tiberius ordered the man's face rubbed all over by the fish. When, however, in the middle of being punished, the man said he was glad that he had not brought a very large lobster that he had caught, Tiberius ordered his face to be slashed with the lobster also. He sentenced to death a soldier of the praetorian guard for stealing a peacock from his garden. Another time, on one of his journeys, the litter on which he was being carried got struck in the briars, and Tiberius threw to the ground the man who scouted the route—a centurion in the first cohorts—and nearly beat him to death.

61. Later he burst out into every sort of crime, never lacking for an opportunity: he first went after friends and even acquaintances of his mother, then those of his grandsons and daughter-in-law, and finally those of Sejanus. After Sejanus' death, he was found to be especially harsh, and so it really became clear that it was not that Tiberius was spurred on by Sejanus: Sejanus gave Tiberius the opportunities that *he* was looking for. And yet in the notes in which he briefly summarized his life, he dared to write that he had punished Sejanus because he had realized that Sejanus had raged savagely against the children of his son Germanicus. In fact, Tiberius killed one of those children after Sejanus had already come under suspicion, and the other only after Sejanus' fall.

(2) To go through all of his acts of cruelty one by one would be tedious. It will be sufficient to relate the general categories of his savagery. Not a day passed without people getting punished, not even days when public business was banned; some were put to death on New Year's Day. Many were accused and condemned along with their children—and even by their children. It was forbidden for the relatives of those sentenced to death to mourn them. Special rewards were decreed to accusers, sometimes even to witnesses. Credence always was given to informers.

(3) Every crime was considered a capital one, even if it consisted of a few innocent words. It was held against a poet that in a tragedy he had insulted Agamemnon, against a historian that he had said Brutus and Cassius were the last of the Romans; the authors were put to death and their writings destroyed, although their work had met

with approval when recited some years before, with even Augustus listening.

(4) Some of those put into prison not only had the consolation of reading taken away; they even lost the privilege of speech and conversation. Summoned to plead their cases, some wounded themselves at home, sure they would be condemned and wishing to avoid harassment and shame, while others drank poison in the middle of the Senate-house; and yet, with their wounds bound up, half-alive and still breathing, they were dragged to the jail. All of those put to death were thrown out on the Steps of Mourning and dragged with a hook to the Tiber River. On a single day, twenty met this fate, including women and boys. (5) Since by tradition it was forbidden for virgins to be strangled, young girls were first violated by the executioner, then strangled.

Those who wanted to die were forced to live. Tiberius regarded death so light a punishment that when he heard that one of those on trial, a man named Carnulus, had taken his life, he cried out, "Carnulus has escaped me!" And as he was inspecting the prisons, when a man begged for his punishment to end, Tiberius replied: "I have not yet reconciled myself to you."

(6) A former consul included this story in his annals: at a crowded party, at which the historian himself was present, Tiberius was all of a sudden asked out loud by a dwarf standing among the jesters at the table why Paconius, on trial for treason, was still alive. Tiberius immediately scolded the man for his cheekiness, but a few days later he wrote to the Senate that they must decide as soon as possible about the punishment for Paconius.

62. Irritated by a disclosure about the death of his son Drusus, he increased his savagery and took it to greater lengths. He had been under the impression that Drusus had died from illness and extravagant living. And so, when he at last learned that Drusus had been poisoned through the treachery of Livilla (Drusus' wife) and Sejanus, Tiberius did not spare anybody torture or punishment. He was so entirely focused on this investigation and wrapped up in it for entire days, that when he was told of the arrival of a guest from Rhodes, whom in a friendly letter he had asked to Rome, he ordered that the man should immediately be tortured, thinking that somebody essential to the trial had come. Then, when the mistake was discovered, the man was ordered killed so that he would not publicize the wrong he had suffered.

(2) The site of his executions on Capri is still shown today. From it, after long and elaborate tortures, he would order the condemned thrown into the sea while he looked on. A group of marines picked up the bodies and struck them with poles and oars so that not a drop of

life was left in them. Among the types of torture he had devised was this: men would be tricked into loading themselves up with a large drink of wine and then all of a sudden he would tie their penises up and put them under the simultaneous strain of the cords and the blockage of their urine.

(3) Had not death prevented him and Thrasyllus—deliberately, they say—forced him to put off certain actions in the hope of a longer life, it is believed he would have killed quite a few more and even would have taken the lives of his remaining grandchildren, since he held Gaius under suspicion and he spurned Tiberius as the fruit of an adulterous union.¹¹ This is likely to be true: over and over he called Priam lucky for having outlived all of his family members.

63. There are many signs not just of how hated and cursed he was through all of this, but also how much he lived in fear, even subject to insult. He forbade the soothsayers from being consulted, except openly and with witnesses. He also tried to suppress the oracles near the city of Rome, but stopped after being frightened by the power of the Praenestine lots: sealed up in a box and taken to Rome, they could not be found until the box was taken back to the temple. (2) After giving provinces to a few former consuls, he did not dare let the men leave his sight and held them back until a few years later he named their successors. In the meantime, as their official title remained, he frequently assigned them many tasks, which they had carried out by their officers and assistants.

64. After his daughter-in-law and grandsons were condemned, he never had them moved except in chains and in a closed litter. A guard prevented all who met them on the journey from looking at them or even from stopping.

65. Sejanus was plotting revolution, and it was only with difficulty that Tiberius finally destroyed him, even though he saw that by this point Sejanus' birthday was being celebrated publicly and golden statues of him worshipped everywhere. Tiberius did it with sly cunning rather than imperial authority. The first step was to remove Sejanus from his presence while appearing to honor him. Tiberius made him his colleague in his fifth consulship, taking up the office after a long hiatus but *in absentia*, precisely for this purpose. Then, deceiving him with the hope of a relationship by marriage and tribunician power, the emperor had him off his guard and attacked him in a shameful and pathetic speech sent to Rome. Among other things, he begged the Senators to send one of the consuls with a guard of soldiers to bring him, a poor and lonely old man, into their presence. (2) Still distrustful, however, and fearing a revolt, he ordered his grandson Drusus, who was still imprisoned in Rome, to be freed, if the situation demanded it, and put in command. He also had

ships prepared and thought about fleeing to some of the legions. From a lofty cliff he kept watching for signals that he had ordered to be made from afar when anything happened, to prevent the messages from being late. But even after the conspiracy of Sejanus was stopped, he was no more free of worry or steadfast, and for the next nine months he did not leave the so-called Villa of Io.¹²

66. Moreover, all kinds of reproaches coming from every direction disturbed his already anxious mind. Every person condemned to death piled all types of abuse on him, either in person or through pamphlets left in the theater. He was affected by these in quite different ways: sometimes, out of a feeling of shame, he wanted everything to remain unknown and hidden, while at other times he considered what was said to be unimportant and actually spread it around widely. He even was attacked in a letter of Artabanus, the Parthian king, who faulted him for his parricides, his murders, his idleness, and his luxury, and urged him to atone for the strong and well-deserved hatred citizens had for him by immediately taking his own life.

67. Finally, even Tiberius was disgusted with himself and admitted that he had all but reached a low in misery in a letter that began as follows: "What should I write to you, Senators, or how should I write, or what should I not write at all at this time? May the gods and goddesses strike me with something worse than my feeling that every day is death, if I know!"

(2) Some think that he had gained awareness of all of this in advance through a knowledge of the future and had long before foreseen how much bitterness and notoriety lay in store for him; and that, when he entered into imperial power, he stubbornly refused to be called "Father of His Country" and have his acts affirmed by oath so that he would not be found unworthy of such honors and thereby increase his disgrace. (3) This can clearly be concluded from a speech of his that he gave on both matters, for example where he says: "I will always be true to myself and never change my ways, for as long as I am of sound mind. But the Senate should set a good precedent and not bind itself to the acts of anybody, since a person might through some misfortune change."

And this passage too: (4) "If you ever come to have doubts about my character and my dedication to you—and before this should happen, may my final day spare me from a change in your opinion of me—the title of Father will then add no honor to me, but be a reproach to you, either for the rashness in which you gave this name to me or the inconstancy of reversing your view of me." (*Tiberius* 38–67)

Tiberius died in A.D. 37, seventy-six years old. He was traveling in

southern Italy, trying to get back to Capri, when he succumbed—probably to natural illness, although some later claimed his grandson Caligula had murdered him. The news of his death caused such joy in Rome that people ran around shouting: “Tiberius to the Tiber!”

38. Biennio continuo post adeptum imperium pedem porta non extulit; sequenti tempore praeterquam in propinqua oppida et, cum longissime, Antio tenus nusquam afuit, idque perraro et paucos dies; quamuis prouincias quoque et exercitus reuisurum se saepe pronuntiasset et prope quotannis profectionem praepararet, uehiculis comprehensis, commeatibus per municipia et colonias dispositis, ad extremum uota pro itu et reditu suo suscipi passus, ut uulgo iam per iocum Callip <p>ides uocaretur, quem cursitare ac ne cubiti quidem mensuram progredi prouerbio Graeco notatum est.

39. sed orbatus utroque filio, quorum Germanicus in Syria, Drusus Romae obierat, secessum Campaniae petit; constanti et opinione et sermone paene omnium quasi neque rediturus umquam et cito mortem etiam obiturus. quod paulo minus utrumque euenit; nam neque Romam amplius rediit [s]et paucos post dies iuxta Tarracinam in praetorio, cui Spelunca nomen est, incenante eo complura et ingentia saxa fortuito superne dilapsa sunt, multisque conuiuorum et ministrorum elisis praeter spem euasit.

40. Peragrata Campania, cum Capuae Capitolium, Nolae templum Augusti, quam causam profectionis praetenderat, dedicasset, Capreas se contulit, praecipue delectatus insula, quod uno paruoque litore adiretur, saepta undique praeruptis immensae altitudinis rupibus et profundo mari[s]. statimque reuocante assidua obtestatione populo propter cladem, qua apud Fidenas supra uiginti hominum milia gladiatorio munere amphitheatri ruina perierant, transiit in continentem potestatemque omnibus adeundi sui fecit: tanto mag <is mirantibus cunct>is, quod urbe egrediens ne quis se interpellaret edixerat ac toto itinere adeuntis submouerat.

41. Regressus in insulam rei p. quidem curam usque adeo abiecit, ut postea non decurias equitum umquam supplerit, non tribunos militum praefectosque, non prouinciarum praesides ullos mutauerit, Hispaniam et Syriam per aliquot annos sine consularibus legatis habuerit, Armeniam a Parthis occupari, Moesiam a Dacis Sarmatisque, Gallias a Germanis uastari neglexerit: magno dedecore imperii nec minore discrimine.

42. ceterum secreti licentiam nactus et quasi ciuitatis oculis remotis, cuncta simul uitia male diu dissimulata tandem profudit: de quibus singillatim ab exordio referam. in castris tiro etiam tum propter nimiam uini auiditatem pro Tiberio Biberius, pro Claudio Caldus, pro Nerone Mero uocabatur. postea princeps in ipsa publicorum morum correctione cum Pomponio Flacco et L. Pisone noctem continuumque biduum epulando potandoque consumpsit, quorum alteri Syriam prouinciam, alteri praefecturam urbis confestim detulit, codicillis quoque iucundissimos et omnium horarum amicos professus. (2) Cestio Gall[i]o, libidinoso ac prodigo seni, olim ab

Augusto ignominia notato et a se ante paucos dies apud senatum increpito cenam ea lege condixit, ne quid ex consuetudine immutaret aut demeret, utque nudis puellis ministrantibus cenaretur. ignotissimum quaesturae candidatum nobilissimis anteposuit ob epotam in conuiuio propinante se uini amphoram. Asellio Sabino sestertia ducenta donauit pro dialogo, in quo boleti et ficedulae et ostreae et turdi certamen induxerat. nouum denique officium instituit a uoluptatibus, praeposito equite R. T. Caesonio Prisco.

43. secessu uero Caprensi etiam sellaria excogitauit, sedem arcanarum libidinum, in quam undique conquisiti puellarum et exoletorum greges monstrosique concubitus repertores, quos spintrias appellabat, triplici serie conexi, in uicem incestarent coram ipso, ut aspectu deficientis libidines excitaret. (2) cubicula plurifariam disposita tabellis ac sigillis lasciuissimarum picturarum et figurarum adornauit librisque Elephantidis instruxit, ne cui in opera edenda exemplar impe[t]ratae schemae deesset. in siluis quoque ac nemoribus passim Venerios locos commentus est prost[r]antisque per antra et causa rupes ex utriusque sexus pube Paniscorum et Nympharum habitu, quae palam iam et uulgo nomine insulae abutentes Caprineum dictitabant.

44. Maiore adhuc ac turpiore infamia flagrauit, uix ut referri audiriue, nedum credi fas sit, quasi pueros primae teneritudinis, quos pisciculos uocabat, institueret, ut natanti sibi inter femina uersarentur ac luderent lingua morsuque sensim adpetentes; atque etiam quasi infantes firmiores, necdum tamen lacte depulsos, inguini ceu papillae admoueret, pronior sane ad id genus libidinis et natura et aetate. (2) quare Parrasi quoque tabulam, in qua Meleagro Atalanta ore morigeratur, legatam sibi sub condicione, ut si argumento offenderetur decies pro ea sestertium acciperet, non modo praetulit, sed et in cubiculo dedicauit. fertur etiam in sacrificando quondam captus facie ministri acerram praeferentis nequisse abstinere, quin paene uixdum re diuina peracta ibidem statim seductum constupraret simulque fratrem eius tibicinem; atque utrique mox, quod mutuo flagitium exprobrarant, crura fregisse.

45. feminarum quoque, et quidem illustrium, capitibus quanto opere solitus sit inludere, euidentissime apparuit Malloniae cuiusdam exitu, quam perductam nec quicquam amplius pati constantissime recusantem delatoribus obiecit ac ne ream quidem interpellare desiit, ecquid paeniteret; donec ea relicto iudicio domum se abripuit ferroque transegit, obscaenitate[m] oris hirsuto atque olido seni clare exprobrata. unde mora in Atellanico exhodio proximis ludis adsensu maximo excepta percrebuit, hircum uetulum capreis naturam ligurire.

46. Pecuniae parcus ac tenax comites peregrinationum expeditionumque numquam salario, cibariis tantum sustentauit, una

modo liberalitate ex indulgentia uitrici prosecutus, cum tribus classibus factis pro dignitate cuiusque, primae sescenta sestertia, secundae quadringenta distribuit, ducenta tertiae, quam non amicorum sed Graecorum appellabat.

47. Princeps neque opera ulla magnifica fecit—nam et quae sola susceperat, Augusti templum restitutionemque Pompeiani theatri, imperfecta post tot annos reliquit—neque spectacula omnino edidit; et iis, quae ab aliquo ederentur, rarissime interfuit, ne quid exposceretur, utique postquam comoedum Actium coactus est manumittere. paucorum senatorum inopia sustentata, ne pluribus opem ferret, negavit se aliis subuenturum, nisi senatui iustas necessitatum causas probassent. quo pacto plerosque modestia et pudore deterruit, in quibus Hortalum, Quinti Hortensi oratoris nepotem, qui permodica re familiari auctore Augusto quattuor liberos tulerat.

48. Publice munificentiam bis omnino exhibuit, pro posito milies sestertium gratuito in trienni tempus et rursus quibusdam dominis insularum, quae in monte Caelio deflagrant, pretio restituto. quorum alterum magna difficultate nummaria populo auxilium flagitante coactus est facere, cum per senatus consultum sanxisset, ut faeneratores duas patrimonii partes in solo collocarent, debitores totidem aeris alieni statim soluerent, nec res expediretur; alterum ad mitigandam temporum atrocitatem. quod tamen beneficium tanti aestimavit, ut montem Caelium appellatione mutata uocari Augustum iusserit. (2) militi post duplicata ex Augusti testamento legata nihil umquam largitus est, praeterquam singula milia denariorum praetorianis, quod Seiano se non accommodassent, et quaedam munera Syriacis legionibus, quod solae nullam Seiani imaginem inter signa coluissent. atque etiam missiones ueteranorum rarissimas fecit, ex senio mortem, ex morte compendium captans. ne provincias quidem liberalitate ulla subleuauit, excepta Asia, disiectis terrae motu ciuitatibus.

49. Procedente mox tempore etiam ad rapinas conuertit animum. satis constat, Cn. Lentulum Augurem, cui census maximus fuerit, metu et angore ad fastidium uitae ab eo actum et ut ne quo nisi ipso herede moreretur; condemnatam et generosissimam feminam Lepidam in gratiam Quirini consularis praediuitis et orbi, qui dimissam eam e matrimonio post uicensimum annum ueneni olim in se comparati arguebat; (2) praeterea Galliarum et Hispaniarum Syriaeque et Graeciae principes confiscatos ob tam leue ac tam inpudens calumniarum genus, ut quibusdam non aliud sit obiectum, quam quod partem rei familiaris in pecunia haberent; plurimis etiam ciuitatibus et priuatis ueteres immunitates et ius metallorum ac uectigalium adempta; sed et Vononem regem Parthorum, qui pulsus a suis quasi in fidem p. R. cum ingenti gaza Antiochiam se receperat, spoliatum

perfidia et occisum.

50. Odium aduersus necessitudines in Druso primum fratre detexit, prodita eius epistula, qua secum de cogendo ad restituendam libertatem Augusto agebat, deinde et in reliquis. Iuliae uxori tantum afuit ut relegatae, quod minimum est, officii aut humanitatis aliquid impertiret, ut ex constitutione patris uno oppido clausam domo quoque egredi et commercio hominum frui uetuerit; sed et peculio concesso a patre praebitisque annuis fraudauit, per speciem publici iuris, quod nihil de his Augustus testamento cauisset. (2) matrem Liuiam grauatus uelut partes sibi aequas potentiae uindicantem, et congressum eius assiduum uitauit et longiores secretioresque sermones, ne consiliis, quibus tamen interdum et egere et uti solebat, regi uideretur. tulit etiam perindigne actum in senatu, ut titulis suis quasi Augusti, ita et Liuiae filius adiceretur. (3) quare non parentem patriae appellari, non ullum insignem honorem recipere publice passus est; sed et frequenter admonuit, maioribus nec feminae conuenientibus negotiis abstinere, praecipue ut animaduertit incendio iuxta aedem Vestae et ipsam interuenisse populumque et milites, quo enixius opem ferrent, adhortatam, sicut sub marito solita esset.

51. dehinc ad simultatem usque processit hac, ut ferunt, de causa. instanti saepius, ut ciuitate donatum in decurias adlegeret, negauit alia se condicione adlecturum, quam si pateretur ascribi albo extortum id sibi a matre. at illa commota ueteres quosdam ad se Augusti codicillos de acerbitate et intolerantia morum eius e sacrario protulit atque recitauit. hos et custoditos tam diu et exprobratos tam infeste adeo grauiter tulit, ut quidam putent inter causas secessus hanc ei uel praecipuam fuisse. (2) toto quidem triennio, quo uiuente matre afuit, semel omnino eam nec amplius quam uno die paucissimis uidit horis; ac mox neque aegrae adesse curauit defunctamque et, dum aduentus sui spem facit, complurium dierum mora corrupto demum et tabido corpore funeratam prohibuit consecrari, quasi id ipsa mandasset. testamentum quoque eius pro irritum habuit omnisque amicitias et familiaritates, etiam quibus ea funeris sui curam moriens demandauerat, intra breue tempus afflixit, uno ex iis, equestris ordinis uiro, et in antliam condemnato.

52. Filiorum neque naturalem Drusum neque adoptiuum Germanicum patria caritate dilexit, alterius <virtutibus, alterius> uitii infensus. nam Drusus fluxioris remissiorisque uitae erat. itaque ne mortuo quidem perinde adfectus est, sed tantum non statim a funere ad negotiorum consuetudinem rediit iustitio longiore inhibito. (2) quin et Iliensium legatis paulo serius consolantibus, quasi oblitterata iam doloris memoria, irridens se quoque respondit uicem eorum dolere, quod egregium ciuem Hectorem amisissent. Germanico usque adeo obtrecauit, ut et praeclara facta eius pro superuacuis

eleuari et gloriosissimas uictorias ceu damnosas rei p. increparet. quod uero Alexandream propter immensam et repentinam famem inconsulto se adisset, questus est in senatu. (3) etiam causa mortis fuisse ei per Cn. Pisonem legatum Syriae creditur, quem mox huius criminis reum putant quidam mandata prolaturum, nisi ea secreto ostentant <i auferenda ipsumque iugulandum curasset. propter> quae multifariam inscriptum et per noctes celeberrime adclamatum est: “redde Germanicum!” quam suspicionem confirmauit ipse postea coniuge etiam ac liberis Germanici crudelem in modum afflictis.

53. Nurum Agrippinam post mariti mortem liberius quiddam questam manu apprehendit Graecoque uersu: “si non dominaris,” inquit, “filiola, iniuriam te accipere existimas?” nec ullo mox sermone dignatus est. quondam uero inter cenam porrecta a se poma gustare non ausam etiam uocare desiit, simulans ueneni se crimine accersi; cum praestructum utrumque consulto esset, ut et ipse temptandi gratia offerret et illa quasi certissimum exitium caueret. (2) nouissime calumniatus modo ad statuam Augusti modo ad exercitus confugere uelle, Pandatariam relegauit conuiciantique oculum per centurionem uerberibus excussit. rursus mori inedia destinanti per uim ore diducto infulciri cibum iussit. sed et perseuerantem atque ita absumptam criminosissime insectatus, cum diem quoque natalem eius inter nefastos referendum suasisset, imputauit etiam, quod non laqueo strangulatam in Gemonias abiecerit: proque tali clementia interponi decretum passus est, quo sibi gratiae agerentur et Capitolino Ioui donum ex auro sacraretur.

54. Cum ex Germanico tres nepotes, Neronem et Drusum et Gaium, ex Druso unum Tiberium haberet, destitutus morte liberorum maximos natus de Germanici filiis, Neronem et Drusum, patribus conscriptis commendauit diemque utriusque tirocinii congiario plebei dato celebrauit. sed ut comperit ineunte anno pro eorum quoque salute publice uota suscepta, egit cum senatu, non debere talia praemia tribui nisi expertis et aetate prouectis. (2) atque ex eo patefacta interiore animi sui nota omnium criminationibus obnoxios reddidit uariaque fraude inductos, ut et concitarentur ad conuicia et concitati proderentur, accusauit per litteras amarissime congestis etiam probris et iudicatos hostis fame necauit, Neronem in insula Pontia, Drusum in ima parte Palatii. putant Neronem ad uoluntariam mortem coactum, cum ei carnifex quasi ex senatus auctoritate missus laqueos et uncas ostentaret, Druso autem adeo alimenta subducta, ut tomentum e culcita temptauerit mandere; amborum sic reliquias dispersas, ut uix quandoque colligi possent.

55. Super ueteres amicos ac familiares uiginti sibi e numero principum ciuitatis depoposcerat uelut consiliarios in negotiis publicis. horum omnium uix duos ante tres incolumis praestitit, ceteros alium

alia de causa perculit, inter quos cum plurimorum clade Aelium Seianum; quem ad summam potentiam non tam beniuolentia prouexerat, quam ut esset cuius ministerio ac fraudibus liberos Germanici circumueniret, nepotemque suum ex Druso filio naturalem ad successionem imperii confirmaret.

56. Nihilo lenior in conuictores Graeculos, quibus uel maxime adquiescebat, Xenonem quendam exquisitius sermocinantem cum interrogasset, quatenus illa tam molesta dialectos esset, et ille respondisset Doridem, relegauit Cinariam, existimans exprobratum sibi ueterem secessum, quod Dorice Rhodii loquantur. item cum soleret ex lectione cotidiana quaestiones super cenam proponere comperissetque Seleucum grammaticum a ministris suis perquirere, quos quoque tempore tractaret auctores, atque ita praeparatum uenire, primum a contubernio remouit, deinde etiam ad mortem compulit.

57. Saeua ac lenta natura ne in puero quidem latuit; quam Theodorus Gadareus rhetoricae praeceptor et perspexisse primus sagaciter et assimilasse aptissime uisus est, subinde in obiurgando appellans eum *πηλὸν αἷματι πεφυραμένον*, id est lutum a sanguine maceratum. sed aliquanto magis in principe eluxit, etiam inter initia cum adhuc fauorem hominum moderationis simulatione captaret. (2) scurram, qui praetereunte funere clare mortuo mandaratum, ut nuntiaret Augusto nondum reddi legata quae plebei reliquisset, adtractum ad se recipere debitum ducique ad supplicium imperauit et patri suo uerum referre. nec multo post in senatu Pompeio cuidam equiti R. quiddam perneganti, dum uincula minatur, affirmauit fore ut ex Pompeio Pompeianus fieret, acerba cauillatione simul hominis nomen incessens ueterumque partium fortunam.

58. sub idem tempus consulente praetore an iudicia maiestatis cogi iuberet, exercendas esse leges respondit et atrocissime exercuit. statuae quidam Augusti caput dempserat, ut alterius imponeret; acta res in senatu et, quia ambigebatur, per tormenta quaesita est. damnato reo paulatim genus calumniae eo processit, ut haec quoque capitalia essent: circa Augusti simulacrum seruorum cecidisse, uestimenta mutasse, nummo uel anulo effigiem impressam latrinae aut lupanari intulisse, dictum ullum factumue eius existimatione aliqua laesisse. perit denique et is, qui honorem in colonia sua eodem die decerni sibi passus est, quo decreti et Augusto olim erant.

59. Multa praeterea specie grauitatis ac morum corrigendorum, sed et magis naturae optemperans, ita saeue et atrociter factitauit, ut nonnulli uersiculis quoque et praesentia exprobrarent et futura denuntiarent mala:

Asper et immitis, breuiter uis omnia
dicam?

dispeream, si te mater amare
potest.

Non es eques; quare? non sunt tibi milia
centum;
omnia si quaeras, et Rhodus
exilium est.

Aurea mutasti Saturni saecula, Caesar:
incolumi nam te ferrea semper
erunt.

Fastidit uinum, quia iam sitit iste
cruorem:
tam bibit hunc auide, quam
bibit ante merum.

(2) Aspice felicem sibi, non tibi, Romule,
Sullam
et Marium, si uis, aspice, sed
reducem,
nec non Antoni ciuilia bella mouentis
non semel infectas aspice caede
manus,
et dic: Roma perit! regnavit sanguine
multo,
ad regnum quisquis uenit
ab exilio.

quae primo, quasi ab impatientibus remedi<or>um ac non tam ex
animi sententia quam bile et stomacho fingerentur, uolebat accipi
dicebatque identidem: “oderint, dum probent.” dein uera plane
certaque esse ipse fecit fidem.

60. In paucis diebus quam Capreas attigit piscatori, qui sibi
secretum agenti grandem mullum inopinanter obtulerat, perfricari
eodem pisce faciem iussit, territus quod is a tergo insulae per aspera et
deuia erepsisset ad se; gratulanti autem inter poenam, quod non et
lucustam, quam praegrandem ceperat, obtulisset, lucusta quoque
lacerari os imperauit. militem praetorianum ob subreptum e uiridiario
pauonem capite puniit. in quodam itinere lectica, qua uehebatur,
uepribus impedita exploratorem uiae, primarum cohortium
centurionem, stratum humi paene ad necem uerberauit.

61. mox in omne genus crudelitatis erupit numquam deficiente
materia, cum primo matris, deinde nepotum et nurus, postremo Seiani
familiares atque etiam notos persequeretur; post cuius interitum uel
saeuissimus extitit. quo maxime apparuit, non tam ipsum ab Seiano
concitari solitum, quam Seianum quaerenti occasiones sumministrasse;
etsi commentario, quem de uita sua summatim breuiterque composuit,
ausus est scribere Seianum se punisse, quod comperisset furere
aduersus liberos Germanici filii sui; quorum ipse alterum suspecto

iam, alterum oppresso demum Seiano interemit.

(2) Singillatim crudeliter facta eius exequi longum est; genera, uelut exemplaria saeuitiae, enumerare sat erit. nullus a poena hominum cessauit dies, ne religiosus quidem ac sacer; animaduersum in quosdam ineunte anno nouo. accusati damnatique multi cum liberis atque etiam a liberis suis. interdictum ne capite damnatos propinqui lugerent. decreta accusatoribus praecipua praemia, nonnumquam et testibus. nemini delatorum fides abrogata. (3) omne crimen pro capitali receptum, etiam paucorum simpliciumque uerborum. obiectum est poetae, quod in tragoedia Agamemnonem probris lacesisset; obiectum et historico, quod Brutum Cassiumque ultimos Romanorum dixisset; animaduersum statim in auctores scriptaque abolita, quamuis probarentur ante aliquot annos etiam Augusto audiente recitata. (4) quibusdam custodiae traditis non modo studendi solacium ademptum, sed etiam sermonis et conloqui usus. citati ad causam dicendam partim se domi uulnerauerunt certi damnationis et ad uexationem ignominiamque uitandam, partim in media curia uenenum hauserunt; et tamen conligatis uulneribus ac semianimes palpitantesque adhuc in carcerem rapti. nemo punitorum non in Gemonias abiectus uncoque tractus, uiginti uno die abiecti tractique, inter eos feminae et pueri. (5) immaturae puellae, quia more tradito nefas esset uirgines strangulari, uitiatas prius a carnifice, dein strangulatae. mori uolentibus uis adhibita uiuendi. nam mortem adeo leue supplicium putabat, ut cum audisset unum e reis, Carnulum nomine, anticipasse eam, exclamauerit: "Carnulus me euasit." et in recognoscendis custodiis precanti cuidam poenae maturitatem respondit: "nondum tecum in gratiam redii." (6) annalibus suis uir consularis inseruit, frequenti quodam conuiuio, cui et ipse affuerit, interrogatum eum subito et clare a quodam nano astante mensae inter copreas, cur Paconius maiestatis reus tam diu uiueret, statim quidem petulantiam linguae obiurgasse, ceterum post paucos dies scripsisse senatui, ut de poena Paconi quam primum statueret.

62. Auxit intenditque saeuitiam exacerbatus indicio de morte filii sui Drusi. quem cum morbo et intemperantia perisse existimaret, ut tandem ueneno interemptum fraude Liuillae uxoris atque Seiani cognouit, neque tormentis neque supplicio cuiusquam pepercit, soli huic cognitioni adeo per totos dies deditus et intentus, ut Rhodiensem hospitem, quem familiaribus litteris Romam euocarat, aduenisse sibi nuntiatum torqueri sine mora iusserit, quasi aliquis ex necessariis quaestioni adesset, deinde errore detecto et occidi, ne uulgaret iniuriam. (2) carnificinae eius ostenditur locus Capreis, unde damnatos post longa et exquisita tormenta praecipitari coram se in mare iubebat, excipiente classiariorum manu et contis atque remis elidente cadauera, ne cui residui spiritus quicquam inesset.

excogitauerat autem inter genera cruciatus etiam, ut larga meri potione per fallaciam oneratos, repente ueretris deligatis, fidicularum simul urinaeque tormento distenderet. (3) quod nisi eum et mors praeuenisset et Thrasyllus consulto, ut aiunt, differre quaedam spe longioris uitae compulisset, plures aliquanto necaturus ac ne reliquis quidem nepotibus parsurus creditur, cum et Gaium suspectum haberet et Tiberium ut ex adulterio conceptum aspernaretur. nec abhorret a uero; namque identidem felicem Priamum uocabat, quod superstes omnium suorum extitisset.

63. Quam inter haec non modo inuisus ac detestabilis, sed praetrepidus quoque atque etiam contumeliis obnoxius uixerit, multa indicia sunt. haruspices secreto ac sine testibus consuli uetuit. uicina uero urbi oracula etiam dis[s]icere conatus est, sed maiestate Praenestinarum sortium territus destitit, cum obsignatas deuectasque Romam non repperisset in arca nisi relata rursus ad templum. (2) unum et alterum consulares oblatis prouinciis non ausus a se dimittere usque eo detinuit, donec successores post aliquot annos praesentibus daret, cum interim manente officii titulo etiam delegaret plurima assidue, quae illi per legatos et adiutores suos exequenda curarent.

64. nurum ac nepotes numquam aliter post damnationem quam catenatos obsutaque lectica loco mouit, prohibitis per militem obuiis ac uiatoribus respicere usquam uel consistere.

65. Seianum res nouas molientem, quamuis iam et natalem eius publice celebrari et imagines aureas coli passim uideret, uix tandem et astu magis ac dolo quam principali auctoritate subuertit. nam primo, ut a se per speciem honoris dimitteret, collegam sibi assumpsit in quinto consulatu, quem longo interuallo absens ob id ipsum susceperat. deinde spe affinitatis ac tribuniciae potestatis deceptum inopinantem criminatus est pudenda miserandaque oratione, cum inter alia patres conscriptos precaretur, mitterent alterum e consulibus, qui se senem et solum in conspectum eorum cum aliquo militari praesidio perduceret. (2) sic quoque diffidens tumultumque metuens Drusum nepotem, quem uinculis adhuc Romae continebat, solui, si res posceret, ducemque constitui praeceperat. aptatis etiam nauibus ad quascumque legiones meditabatur fugam, speculabundus ex altissima rupe identidem signa, quae, ne nuntii morarentur, tolli procul, ut quidque factum foret, mandauerat. uerum et oppressa coniuratione Seiani nihilo securior aut constantior per nouem proximos menses non egressus est uilla, quae uocatur Ionis.

66. Vrebant insuper anxiam mentem uaria undique conuicia, nullo non damnatorum omne probri genus coram uel per libellos in orchestra positos ingerente. quibus quidem diuersissime adficiebatur, modo ut prae pudore ignota et celata cuncta cuperet, nonnumquam eadem contemneret et proferret ultro atque uulgaret. quin et Artabani

Parthorum regis laceratus est litteris parricidia et caedes et ignauiam et luxuriam obicientis monentisque, ut uoluntaria morte maximo iustissimoque ciuium odio quam primum satis faceret.

67. postremo semet ipse pertaesus, tali[s] epistulae principio tantum non summam malorum suorum professus est: “quid scribam uobis, p. c., aut quo modo scribam, aut quid omnino non scribam hoc tempore, dii me deaeque peius perdant quam cotidie perire sentio, si scio.”

(2) Existimant quidam praescisse haec eum peritia futurorum ac multo ante, quanta se quandoque acerbitas et infamia maneret, prospexisse; ideoque, ut imperium inierit, et patris patriae appellationem et ne in acta sua iuraretur obstinatissime recusasse, ne mox maiore dedecore impar tantis honoribus inueniretur. (3) quod sane ex oratione eius, quam de utraque re habuit, colligi potest; uel cum ait: similem se semper sui futurum nec umquam mutaturum mores suos, quam diu sanae mentis fuisset; sed exempli causa cauendum esse, ne se senatus in acta cuiusquam obligaret, quia aliquo casu mutari posset. et rursus: (4) “Si quando autem,” inquit, “de moribus meis deuotoque uobis animo dubitaueritis,—quod prius quam eueniat, opto ut me supremus dies huic mutatae uestrae de me opinioni eripiat—nihil honoris adiciet mihi patria appellatio, uobis autem exprobrabit aut temeritatem delati mihi eius cognominis aut inconstantiam contrarii de me iudicii.”

Gaius Caligula

MAKE YOUR HORSE A CONSUL

Gaius Caligula (A.D. 12–41)

To say that Caligula—the most notorious of Suetonius’ twelve Caesars—had a difficult childhood is to put it mildly. His father Germanicus died when Caligula was seven, and his mother Agrippina the Elder fell out with Tiberius a few years later. Caligula was shunted from his great-grandmother Livia’s house to his grandmother Antonia’s before finally being summoned, at the age of eighteen, to live with Tiberius on Capri. According to Suetonius, Caligula enjoyed watching the tortures and executions that took place on the island and cavorted at all-night parties dressed in a wig and long robe.

Yet none of that was widely known at the time. When Caligula gained power in A.D. 37, the whole empire rejoiced. The population of Rome, provincials, and soldiers alike all remembered his father fondly. As Caligula escorted the body of the dead Tiberius to Rome, he was met by rapturous crowds, who called him their “star,” their “chick,” their “baby doll.”

Over time, though, Caligula came to seem far worse than Tiberius, especially to senators, as the following two selections from Suetonius’ biography show. In the first, Suetonius describes how Caligula acted less like a princeps (first citizen) and more like an eastern monarch, demanding that he be worshipped as a god and treating the Senate in ways that made Julius Caesar look mild. The second passage adds further details of Caligula’s propensity to give into every whim and the relish he took in putting down others with cruel remarks.

“Remember, I can do whatever I want to whomever I want,” Caligula told his grandmother once. While Tiberius felt shame at his shortcomings and tried to hide them from the public, Caligula flaunted his brutality. This was the secret to power, he decided, perhaps not surprisingly given his upbringing. But he died with no major achievements and a reputation for sadism that has few parallels in history.

22. So far the discussion has been of the emperor; the rest must tell of the monster.

After he had assumed several extra names—he was called “Dutiful,” “Child of the Camps,” “Father of the Armies,” and “the Greatest and Best Caesar”—he happened to hear some kings who had come to Rome to pay their respects competing over dinner about the superiority of their descent. “Let there be one prince, one king!” he cried out.¹ He came close to immediately putting on a crown and changing what could be passed off as a principate into the reality of a monarchy.

(2) Advised that he had risen above the eminence of emperors and kings alike, he began from then on to claim for himself divine majesty. He commissioned some men to remove from Greece statues of gods particularly well-known for their religious power and artistry, including the Zeus of Olympia; their heads were to be taken off so Caligula could attach his own. He extended part of the Palatine Hill all the way to the Forum and turned the Temple of Castor and Pollux into an entry-court; he would often sit between the two brothers, presenting himself for adoration to all who came as suppliants.² Some men hailed him as Jupiter Latiaris.

(3) He also set up a temple for his own godhead with priests and the most exquisite sacrificial victims. Within the temple stood a golden statue that looked just like him and every day it was dressed in the same outfit that he was wearing. The wealthiest men gained priestly offices in turn, fiercely competing for them with the highest bids. The sacrificial victims were flamingoes, peacocks, grouse, guinea fowls, and pheasant: each type was offered on its own specific day.

(4) At night, when the moon was full and bright, he would continuously invite her to lie in his embrace. During the day he would secretly talk with Jupiter Capitolinus, sometimes whispering to him and then offering his ear in turn, sometimes speaking loudly and abusively. He was heard to say threateningly “Either lift me up or I will!” until finally he was prevailed upon by requests (so he claimed anyway) to share Jupiter’s dwelling. Throwing up a bridge over the Temple of the Divine Augustus, he joined the Palatine and Capitoline Hills. Later, so he could be even closer, he started building a new house in the area in front of the Temple of Jupiter.

23. He did not want to be thought or called the grandson of Agrippa, because of that man’s undistinguished birth, and he grew angry if anybody in a speech or poem included Agrippa among the ancestors of the Caesars.³ He even proclaimed that his mother was conceived by an act of incest, committed by Augustus with his daughter Julia. And not content with this attack on Augustus, he forbade the victories of Actium and Sicily to be celebrated with annual

festivals, claiming they had brought ruin and death on the Roman People.⁴

(2) He repeatedly called his great-grandmother Livia Augusta “Ulysses in a dress.” He even dared, in a letter to the Senate, to accuse her of undistinguished birth, claiming that her paternal grandfather was a town councilor from Fundi. In fact, it is clear from official documents that Aufidius Lurco held political offices in Rome. When his grandmother Antonia sought a private audience he refused her unless the prefect Macro was present. Indignities of this kind and the disgust she felt led to her death, although some say that Caligula also poisoned her. After she died, he bestowed no honor on her and watched her pyre burn from his dining room.

(3) He suddenly and unexpectedly turned on his brother Tiberius, unleashing a military officer on him.⁵ He also forced his father-in-law Silanus to kill himself by cutting his throat with a razor. He gave a reason for each action. For Silanus it was that he had not followed Caligula onto a stormy sea but had stayed behind in the hope of seizing Rome if anything should happen to Caligula. For Tiberius it was that he smelled of a remedy taken to prevent poisoning by Caligula. In fact, what Silanus was avoiding was his inability to put up with seasickness and the trouble sea travel caused him, and Tiberius was using the medication because of a persistent cough which was growing worse.

His uncle Claudius he kept alive only to make fun of him.

24. With all of his sisters he was in the habit of having illicit sexual intercourse.⁶ At a crowded party, he placed each of them in turn below him on the couch while his wife was lying on the couch above.⁷ Drusilla he is believed to have violated when she was a virgin and he was still underage. He even once was caught having intercourse with her by his grandmother Antonia, at whose house they were being raised. Later, after Drusilla had been given out in marriage to Lucius Cassius Longinus, a former consul, he snatched her away and openly treated her as his legal wife. During an illness he made her the heir of his property and the empire. (2) When she died, he declared a period of mourning, in which it was a capital crime to laugh, to bathe, or to dine with parents, spouse, or children. Unable to bear his grief, he suddenly left the city of Rome by night, crossed through Campania, and made it to Syracuse, from where he then quickly came back, his beard and hair grown out. Nor did he ever afterward make an oath on any matter however small, not even before an assembly of the people or the soldiers, except by the godhead of Drusilla.

(3) On his other sisters he did not lavish very much desire or esteem: he often made them available to his male prostitutes. So that he could convict them more easily, in the trial of Aemilius Lepidus, of

adultery and of abetting Lepidus in the plot against him, he not only made public all of the documents he had obtained through trickery and sexual favors, he also dedicated to Mars the Avenger three swords prepared to kill him, adding a dedicatory inscription.

25. Whether he contracted, ended, or maintained his marriages with greater shame is difficult to decide. When Livia Orestilla was marrying Gaius Piso and Caligula had come to pay his respects, he ordered that she be brought to him but then within a few days he divorced her and two years later banished her because it appeared that in the meantime she had once again sought the enjoyment of her former husband. Others say that when he was invited to the wedding dinner, he instructed Piso, reclining opposite him, "Don't force yourself on my wife!"; he then immediately dragged her from the party and the next day said that he had obtained a marriage for himself following the example of Romulus and Augustus.

(2) Then there was Lollia Paulina, married to Gaius Memmius, the former consul who governed armies. When mention was made of how beautiful her grandmother had once been, he suddenly summoned her from the province where she was, made her husband pimp her, married her, and then after a brief interval let her go, although he forbade her ever again to sleep with anyone.

(3) Caesonia he loved passionately and steadfastly. It was not because of her conspicuous beauty or her young age—she was already the mother of three daughters from another man—but she was a woman of utter extravagance and looseness. He often put her in a military cape, shield, and helmet and would show her, riding next to him, to the soldiers. He even showed her to his friends naked. He did not deem her worthy of the name of wife until she had given birth: on the very same day he declared himself her husband and the father of the baby girl born to her. (4) The baby, however, named Julia Drusilla, he carried through the temples of all the goddesses and placed in the lap of Minerva, entrusting her to be brought up and instructed. He did not think there was any stronger sign of the little girl's paternity than her fierceness, which even then was very great. With her dangerous little fingers she would attack the faces and eyes of the other young children playing with her.

26. It would be of little importance and interest to add to this account how he treated his other relatives and friends: Ptolemy, the son of King Juba, and his cousin (since Ptolemy was the grandson of Marcus Antonius through Antonius' daughter Selene); and especially Macro himself, along with Ennia, who helped him into power.⁸ On all of them, as recompense for their family connection and the good services they had done, a bloody death was inflicted.

(2) To the Senate he showed no more mercy or respect. He allowed

some who had achieved the highest offices to run alongside his chariot in their togas for several miles or to stand, dressed in a linen cloth, at the head or the foot of his couch as he dined. When he had secretly killed some others, he still persisted in sending for them as if they were alive, but a few days later lied and said they had taken their own lives. (3) After the consuls forgot to make a proclamation about his birthday, he removed them from office, and the state was without the top magistracy for three days. When his own quaestor was implicated in a conspiracy, he flogged him, stripping off the man's clothes and laying them under the feet of the soldiers so that they would have a firm footing when they beat him.

(4) He treated the other groups in Roman society with similar arrogance and violence. Disturbed in the middle of the night by a loud roar in the Circus made by men grabbing free seats, he drove them all back with clubs: over twenty equestrians were struck in the fray, just as many high-ranking women, and a vast crowd besides. He sowed dissension between the people and the equestrians at theatrical shows by opening the seats early, so that all the lowest people would grab the equestrian section. (5) At gladiatorial contests he sometimes would draw back the awnings when the sun was burning most intensely and refuse to let anyone leave; he also got rid of the usual elaborate arrangements and substituted emaciated animals, the sorriest, most worn-out gladiators, and, for mock-combat, heads of households of good reputation but who had some notable bodily deformity. Sometimes, moreover, he would seal up the granaries and inflict famine on the people.

27. He showed his savage nature through the following actions especially. When cattle to feed the beasts being readied for the games was selling at a rather high price, he selected some criminals for butchering. Inspecting a lineup of those under guard, he did not bother to look at what they had been charged with. He just stood in the middle of the portico and ordered them led away, "from baldhead to baldhead."⁹

(2) He required a man who had promised to fight as a gladiator in exchange for the emperor's recovery to keep his word; he watched him slug it out and did not let the man go until he had won and had made many pleas to be kept alive. Another man had, for the same reason, made a vow to die but then was dawdling in carrying it out; Caligula handed him over to the slaves, with orders to drag him through the neighborhoods of Rome decked out with sacred boughs and ribbons, while demanding he fulfill his vow, and then throw him from the rampart.

(3) He disfigured many men of honorable rank with a mark from a branding iron and then condemned them to the mines, road-building,

or the beasts, or he enclosed them in cages on all fours like animals, or he cut them in half with a saw. Not all of these men were punished for serious reasons—but for being critical of his games, or for never swearing by his guardian spirit.

(4) He forced fathers to be present at the execution of their sons. When one pleaded poor health, he sent a litter; another he invited to a feast immediately after the public execution and with every kindness invited him to joke and be merry.

He had his overseer of shows and beast hunts whipped with chains for days on end in his own presence and only stopped when he became disgusted with the odor of the man's putrefying brain. In the middle of the amphitheater's arena he burnt alive the author of an Atellane farce for writing a verse that had a humorous subtext. When a Roman equestrian, thrown to the beasts, proclaimed that he was innocent, Caligula pulled him out, cut his tongue off, and then threw him back into the arena.

28. He asked a man, restored after an old sentence of exile, what he had been in the habit of doing there and the man responded flatteringly: "I always prayed to the gods that Tiberius should die and you should rule, which is exactly what happened!" Concluding that all of the men he had exiled were wishing for *his* death too, he sent agents around the islands to kill them all. Longing for a senator to be torn to pieces, he pressured some men to attack him as he entered the Senate-house, declare him a public enemy, stab him with their writing styluses, and then turn him over to the others to rip apart. Nor was he satisfied until the man's arms, legs, and vital organs were dragged through the streets and heaped up in front of him.

29. He aggravated his truly monstrous deeds with the harshness of his language. He would say that there was nothing in his nature that he admired and approved of more than his—I shall use his own word—*adiatrepsia*, that is, his shamelessness.¹⁰ When his grandmother Antonia gave him some advice, it was not enough for him just to disregard her. "Remember," he said, "I can do whatever I want to whomever I want." When he was about to kill his brother, whom he suspected was taking medicine as a precaution because he feared poisoning, he said: "Do you have an antidote against Caesar?" When he banished his sisters, he said menacingly that he not only had islands, he also had swords. (2) A man serving as a praetor had gone to Anticyra because of his poor health and sent from there several times a request that his leave of absence be extended; Caligula ordered him to be killed and added: "Bloodletting is necessary for one who has taken hellebore for such a long period and did not get better."¹¹ When he signed the sentences of those in prison who were to be put death after the ten-day waiting period, he would say that he was clearing his

accounts. After condemning several Gauls and Greeks at once, he triumphantly exclaimed, "I have conquered Gallograecia!"

30. He seldom allowed anyone to be executed except by frequent small jabs of a knife; his instruction never changed and became famous: "Strike so that he feels he is dying." When a man other than the one he intended was punished—there was a mix-up over names—he said, "This one deserved it just as much." He often tossed around that well-known line from tragedy: "Let them hate me, so long as they're afraid!"¹²

(2) He attacked all the senators together, saying they were the clients of Sejanus, the accusers of his mother and his brothers. He brought out the papers that he had pretended to have burned and he defended Tiberius' savagery as necessary on the grounds that he had no choice but to believe the large number of accusers. He constantly lashed out at the equestrian order for their devotion to acting and gladiatorial combat. Angry with the people because they supported a different team than he did, he shouted: "I wish the Roman People had a single neck!" When there was a demand for the robber Tetrinius, he said that those making the demand were Tetriniuses. (3) Five net-fighting gladiators who wore just tunics were fighting as a group and they yielded without a struggle to the same number of lightly-armed opponents; when they were ordered to be killed, one of them grabbed his trident and killed all of the winners. Caligula, in an edict, mourned this as a most cruel massacre and he cursed those who had been able to stand watching it.

31. He also used openly to complain about the state of affairs in his time, because there were no public disasters to set the age apart. The principate of Augustus was made famous by the Varian massacre, that of Tiberius by the fall of the amphitheater at Fidenae; but his own threatened to fall into oblivion because of its general prosperity. Over and over he wished for military massacres, famine, plague, fires, or a major earthquake.

32. Even when he was relaxing and given over to gaming and feasting, he showed the same savagery in actions and words. Interrogations by torture were often held in his presence when he was eating or reveling; a soldier skilled in decapitation would cut the heads off anyone who was being held prisoner. At the dedication of the bridge at Puteoli, which was planned by him as we have already mentioned, he invited many men from the shore to join him and then suddenly threw them overboard; with poles and oars he drove down into the sea those who had grabbed onto the rudders of ships.¹³

(2) At a public banquet in Rome, when a slave was caught stripping the silver plating off the dining couches, Caligula immediately turned him over to the executioner, with orders to cut off

his hands and dangle them from his neck in front of his chest and to lead him around the groups of diners with a sign in front stating the reason for his punishment.

When a gladiator from the training school was fencing with him using wooden weapons and then deliberately threw himself to the ground, Caligula stabbed him with an iron dagger and ran around with a palm branch like those who have won in the games.

(3) A sacrificial victim was brought to the altar. Caligula, wearing the get-up of an assistant priest, raised the mallet high and slew the man who was to perform the sacrifice.

At a fancy dinner party he suddenly burst into wild laughter and when the consuls, who were reclining next to him, politely asked him why he was laughing, he said: "For no reason, except that with a single nod I could immediately have both of you executed."

33. Here is an example of his humor: standing by a statue of Jupiter, he asked the tragic actor Apelles which of them seemed to him bigger. When Apelles hesitated, he tore him apart in a flogging, and as the man begged for mercy, Caligula from time to time praised his voice, saying that even in his groaning it was delightful. Whenever he kissed the neck of his wife or girlfriend, he would say: "Such a beautiful neck! It will be severed whenever I give the word." He even would occasionally toss around the threat of torturing his beloved Caesonia to find out why he loved her so much.

34. He attacked mankind of practically every period of history with as much envy and nastiness as arrogance and savagery. He knocked down statues of famous men moved by Augustus to the Field of Mars from the Capitoline sanctuary because of overcrowding there. Indeed, he broke them into pieces, so that it was impossible to restore them with their inscriptions intact. From that time forward he also would not allow a statue or portrait of anybody to be set up unless he was consulted and approved it.

(2) He even thought about destroying Homer's poems, saying: "Why aren't I allowed to do the same as Plato, who kicked Homer out of the republic he was establishing?" He came similarly close to removing the writings and busts of Vergil and Titus Livy from all the libraries. He complained that the former had no talent and was poorly educated, while the latter was verbose in his history, and careless. As for the lawyers, he said that he would destroy the fruits of all their learning and often threatened: "By Hercules! I'll make it so that they can't answer anything without going through me."

35. He took away from all the nobles the ancient insignia of their families—from Torquatus the collar, from Cincinnatus the lock of hair, and from Gnaeus Pompeius the name of "the Great" that belonged to his early forebears.¹⁴ Although he summoned Ptolemy (about whom I

wrote above) from his kingdom and received him with respect, he suddenly killed him, for no other reason than, when putting on a show, he noticed that as Ptolemy took his seat, he caused everyone's head to turn by the brightness of his purple cloak. (2) Whenever handsome men with good hair came his way, he would shave the backs of their heads to disfigure them. There was a man named Aesius Proculus, son of a centurion of the first rank, who because of his imposing physique and fine looks was called Colosseros.¹⁵ Caligula dragged him from his seat without warning, forced him into the arena, and paired him first with a Thracian gladiator, then a heavy-armed combatant. Colosseros won both times, and Caligula ordered him to be tied up at once, dressed in rags, led through the neighborhoods of Rome, shown to the women, and then murdered.

(3) In short, no matter how bad a man's circumstances or low his fortune, Caligula still begrudged him whatever advantages he did enjoy. To take on the King of Nemi, who had held that priesthood for many years, he secretly enlisted a much stronger opponent.¹⁶ Another time, at the games, a gladiator named Porius who fought from a chariot received enthusiastic applause for freeing a slave after a victorious match. Caligula rushed out of the seating area so fast, he tripped on his toga and went tumbling down the steps. Seething with anger, he shouted out: "The people who are the masters of the world show more respect to a gladiator for the flimsiest thing than to the deified emperors or to the one in their midst, me!"



50. His stature was tall, his coloring pale, and his body large, except that his neck and legs were very thin. He had hollow temples and eyes, and a wide, grim brow. On his head he had little hair, on his crown none, but otherwise he was hirsute. It was, therefore, considered a fatal crime to look down on him from a superior height as he walked by or for any reason whatsoever to speak of a goat. His countenance, naturally scary and hideous, he purposely made more awful; working with a mirror, he contorted his features to cause complete terror and fright.

(2) Neither his physical nor mental health was good. As a boy, he suffered from epilepsy. When he reached manhood, he was able to put up with hardships fairly well; sometimes, though, he would suddenly feel faint and would barely be able to walk, stand, collect his thoughts, and support his weight. He himself was aware of his mental illness and he sometimes thought of withdrawing to cure his head. He is believed to have been given a love potion by Caesonia which actually drove him mad.

(3) He was especially disturbed by insomnia. He could rest for no

more than three hours at night, nor was it a calm rest but a disturbing one, full of strange visions. He once imagined, for example, that the ocean was talking to him. And so, weary of lying awake, for much of the night he would now sit up in his bed, now wander through long corridors, again and again calling on dawn and waiting for it to come.

51. I feel fully justified in attributing to mental illness two very different faults in the same person: overwhelming confidence and, on the other hand, excessive fear. For although he claimed to despise the gods, at the smallest burst of thunder and clap of lightning he would shut his eyes and cover his head, and, if it was bigger than that, he would jump out of the covers and hide underneath his bed. During his trip to Sicily, although he poked a great deal of fun at the wonders there, he suddenly fled from Messana, at night, terrified by the smoke and the rumbling coming out of the top of Etna.

(2) Likewise, he made the biggest threats against the barbarians—yet when he was traveling in a chariot across the Rhine in a narrow pass with soldiers all around, and somebody said that there would be great trouble if the enemy appeared anywhere, Caligula immediately mounted a horse. He swiftly returned to the bridges, and, when he saw that they were packed with porters and baggage, in frustration at the delay he had himself passed by hand over the men's heads.

(3) At a later time, when a rebellion in Germany was reported, he started preparing to escape and was gathering a fleet for the purpose. The only thing that calmed him down was the thought that at least the overseas provinces would remain, if the victors should seize the heights of the Alps, as the Cimbri had, or even the city of Rome, as the Senones once did. This, I suppose, was what later gave the assassins the idea of falsely telling Caligula's soldiers who were mutinying that he had been frightened by the report of a military defeat and taken his own life.

52. When it came to clothing, shoes, and the rest of his attire, he never wore anything suitable for a Roman citizen, or for a man, or even for a human being. He often appeared in public in coats that were finely embroidered and studded with jewels, wearing a long-sleeved tunic and bracelets. Sometimes he was in silk and a woman's dress. Now he would be in Greek sandals or an actor's shoes, now in army boots, now in women's slippers. He often sported a beard made of gold and would hold a thunderbolt or trident or caduceus, insignia of the gods. He even was seen dressed up as Venus. He frequently wore the attire of a triumphing general—even before the military expedition had taken place—and sometimes the breastplate of Alexander the Great, retrieved from that man's sarcophagus.¹⁷

53. Of the liberal arts, he focused little on the study of literature but a great deal on public speaking. He was very quick and clever,

especially when it came to having the last word against somebody. If he was angry, words and phrases came easily, as did good delivery and a strong voice—so much so that, because of his excitement, he could not remain in the same place and was heard by those standing far away. (2) When about to attack somebody, he threatened to draw the sword of his nighttime toils. He despised the gentler, smoother style of speaking so much that he said that Seneca, then at the height of his popularity, was composing mere school exercises: he was sand without lime.¹⁸

He also made a habit of writing rebuttals of the speeches of orators that were successful, and composing prosecutions and defenses of important men on trial in the Senate; he spoke in support of or against somebody in accordance with how easily his pen had flowed. By edict he summoned the equestrian order to come listen to him as well.

54. He also practiced with the greatest enthusiasm other sorts of arts that were quite different from one another. He was a gladiator of the Thracian type and a charioteer, a singer and a dancer; he fought with combat weapons; he drove chariots in racetracks set up in many places. So carried away was he by the pleasure he took in singing and dancing, that not even at public performances could he refrain from singing along with the tragedian as he performed or from openly making the actor's gestures—ostensibly to praise or to correct him. (2) On the day on which he died, he had ordered an all-night festival, purely it seems to take advantage of the freedom offered by the occasion and make his debut on the stage. Sometimes he even danced at night. And once, he summoned three men of consular rank during the second watch of the night to the Palatine. They arrived in a state of extreme fear, he put them onto the stage, and then, with a sudden clattering of castanets and flutes, he sprang forth dressed in a women's cloak and a tunic that went to his ankles, danced one number, and left. Yet this man, so apt a pupil in everything else, did not know how to swim.

55. Those he took a fondness to he favored to the point of insanity. He would kiss Mnester the dancer even in the middle of his performances, and if anybody criticized the man's dancing, even gently, Caligula ordered him to be dragged away and would personally beat him. When an equestrian was making a disturbance, Caligula sent him orders, through a centurion, to leave without delay for Ostia and to take a letter he had written to King Ptolemy in Mauretania. The upshot of it was: "To the bearer of this letter do neither good nor harm." (2) He put some Thracian-style gladiators in charge of the German bodyguards. He cut back the weaponry of the murmillones.¹⁹ When a gladiator named Columbus won his match, yet was lightly wounded, Caligula added into the cut some poison, which

from then on was called “Columbine.” At least, a poison with this label, written in his own hand, was found along with his others.

He was so slavishly devoted to the Greens that he was always dining in their stable and staying there; at a banquet he once gave 2,000,000 sesterces as a party favor to their driver Eutychus.²⁰ (3) So that his racehorse Incitatus would not be disturbed on the day before games, he would send his soldiers to enforce silence on the neighborhood. In addition to a marble stable and an ivory manger, purple covers and collars of jewels, Caligula also gave the horse a house, slaves, and furniture so that guests invited in Incitatus’ name would be entertained more sumptuously. It is even said that he planned to make him consul. (*Gaius Caligula* 22–35 and 50–55)

“I wish the Roman people had a single neck!” Caligula once cried out, in anger. He, of course, did. On the 24th of January A.D. 41, the last day of the Palatine Games held each year in honor of Augustus, Caligula was assassinated by members of his Praetorian Guard. The lead part in the conspiracy was taken by Cassius Chaerea, a tough old officer taunted by Caligula as effeminate (Chaerea had a surprisingly soft voice). The emperor’s nasty jokes had finally caught up with him.

22. Hactenus quasi de principe, reliqua ut de monstro narranda sunt.

Compluribus cognominibus adsumptis—nam et pius et castrorum filius et pater exercituum et optimus maximus Caesar uocabatur—cum audiret forte reges, qui officii causa in urbem aduenerant, concertantis apud se super cenam de nobilitate generis, exclamauit:

εἷς κοίρανος ἔστω, εἷς βασιλεύς.

nec multum afuit quin statim diadema sumeret speciemque principatus in regni formam conuerteret. (2) uerum admonitus et principum et regum se excessisse fastigium, diuinam ex eo maiestatem asserere sibi coepit; datoque negotio, ut simulacra numinum religione et arte praeclara, inter quae Olympii Iouis, apportarentur e Graecia, quibus capite dempto suum imponderet, partem Palatii ad forum usque promouit, atque aede Castoris et Pollucis in uestibulum transfigurata, consistens saepe inter fratres deos, medium adorandum se adeuntibus exhibebat; et quidam eum Latiarem Iouem consalutarunt. (3) templum etiam numini suo proprium et sacerdotes et excogitatissimas hostias instituit. in templo simulacrum stabat aureum iconicum amiciebaturque cotidie ueste, quali ipse uteretur. magisteria sacerdotii ditissimus quisque et ambitione et litatione maxima uicibus comparabant. hostiae erant phoenicopteri, pauones, tetraones, numidicae, meleagrides, phasianae, quae generatim per singulos dies immolarentur. (4) et noctibus quidem plenam fulgentemque lunam inuitabat assidue in amplexus atque concubitum, interdiu uero cum Capitolino Ioue secreto fabulabatur, modo insusurrans ac praebens in uicem aurem, modo clarius nec sine iurgiis. nam uox comminantis audita est:

ἢ μ' ἀνάειρ' ἢ ἐγὼ σέ,

donec exoratus, ut referebat, et in contubernium ultro inuitatus super templum Diui Augusti ponte transmisso Palatium Capitoliumque coniunxit. mox, quo propior esset, in area Capitolina nouae domus fundamenta iecit.

23. Agrippae se nepotem neque credi neque dici ob ignobilitatem eius uolebat suscensebatque, si qui uel oratione uel carmine imaginibus eum Caesarum insererent. praedicabat autem matrem suam ex incesto, quod Augustus cum Iulia filia admisisset, procreatam; ac non contentus hac Augusti insectatione Actiacas Si[n]culasque uictorias, ut funestas p. R. et calamitasas, uetuit sollempnibus feriis celebrari. (2) Liuiam Augustam proauiam Vlixem stolatum identidem appellans, etiam ignobilitatis quadam ad senatum epistula arguere

ausus est quasi materno auctore decurione Fundano ortam, cum publicis monumentis certum sit, Aufidium Lurconem Romae honoribus functum. auia Antoniae secretum petenti denegauit, nisi ut interueniret Macro praefectus, ac per istius modi indignitates et taedia causa extitit mortis, dato tamen, ut quidam putant, et ueneno; nec defunctae ullum honorem habuit prospexitque e triclinio ardentem rogam. (3) fratrem Tiberium inopinantem repente immisso tribuno militum interemit Silanum item socerum ad necem secandasque nouacula fauces compulit, causatus in utroque, quod hic ingressum se turbatus mare non esset secutus ac spe occupandi urbem, si quid sibi per tempestates accideret, remansisset, ille antidotum obol[e]uisset, quasi ad praecauenda uenena sua sumptum, cum et Silanus impatientiam nauseae uitasset et molestiam nauigandi, et Tiberius propter assiduam et ingrauescentem tussim medicamento usus esset. nam Claudium patrum non nisi in ludibrium reseruauit.

24. Cum omnibus sororibus suis consuetudinem stupri fecit plenoque conuiuio singulas infra se uicissim conlocabat uxore supra cubante. ex iis Drusillam uitiasse uirginem praetextatus adhuc creditur atque etiam in concubitu eius quondam deprehensus ab Antonia auia, apud quam simul educabantur; mox Lucio Cassio Longino consulari conlocatam abduxit et in modum iustae uxoris propalam habuit; heredem quoque bonorum atque imperii aeger instituit. (2) eadem defuncta iustitium indixit, in quo risisse lauasse cenasse cum parentibus aut coniuge liberisque capital fuit. ac maeroris impatiens, cum repente noctu profugisset ab urbe transcucurrissetque Campaniam, Syracusas petit, rursusque inde propere rediit barba capilloque promisso; nec umquam postea quantiscumque de rebus, ne pro contione quidem populi aut apud milites, nisi per numen Drusillae deierauit. (3) reliquas sorores nec cupiditate tanta nec dignatione dilexit, ut quas saepe exoletis suis prostra <ue>rit; quo facilius eas in causa Aemili Lepidi condemnauit quasi adulteras et insidiarum aduersus se conscias ei nec solum chirographa omnium requisita fraude ac stupro diuulgauit, sed et tres gladios in necem suam praeparatos Marti Vltori addito elogio consecrauit.

25. Matrimonia contraxerit turpius an dimiserit an tenuerit, non est facile discernere. Liuiam Orestillam C. Pisoni nubentem, cum ad officium et ipse uenisset, ad se deduci imperauit intraque paucos dies repudiatam biennio post relegauit, quod repetisse usum prioris mariti tempore medio uidebatur. alii tradunt adhibitum cenae nuptiali mandasse ad Pisonem contra accumbentem: “noli uxorem meam premere,” statimque e conuiuio abduxisse secum ac proximo die edixisse: matrimonium sibi repertum exemplo Romuli et Augusti. (2) Lolliam Paulinam, C. Memmio consulari exercitus regenti nuptam, facta mentione auiae eius ut quondam pulcherrimae, subito ex

prouincia euocauit ac perductam a marito coniunxit sibi breuique missam fecit interdicto cuiusquam in perpetuum coitu. (3) Caesoniam neque facie insigni neque aetate integra matremque iam ex alio uiro trium filiarum, sed luxuriae ac lasciuiae perditae, et ardentius et constantius amauit, ut saepe chlamyde peltaque et galea ornatam ac iuxta adequitantem militibus ostenderit, amicis uero etiam nudam. uxorio nomine dignatus est [†]quam enixam, uno atque eodem die professus et maritum se eius et patrem infantis ex ea natae. (4) infantem autem, Iuliam Drusillam appellatam, per omnium dearum templa circumferens Mineruae gremio imposuit alendamque et instituendam commendauit. nec ullo firmitate indicio sui seminis esse credebat quam feritatis, quae illi quoque tanta iam tunc erat, ut infestis digitis ora et oculos simul ludentium infantium incesceret.

26. leue ac frigidum sit his addere, quo propinquos amicosque pacto tractauerit, Ptolemaeum regis Iubae filium, consobrinum suum —erat enim et is M. Antoni ex Selene filia nepos—et in primis ipsum Macronem, ipsam Enniam. adiutores imperii: quibus omnibus pro necessitudinis iure proque meritorum gratia cruenta mors persoluta est.

(2) Nihilo reuerentior leniorue erga senatum, quosdam summis honoribus functos ad essedum sibi currere togatos per aliquot passuum milia et cenanti modo ad pluteum modo ad pedes stare succinctos linteo passus est; alios cum clam interemisset, citare nihilo minus ut uiuos perseuerauit, paucos post dies uoluntaria morte perisse mentitus. (3) consulibus oblitis de natali suo edicere abrogauit magistratum fuitque per triduum sine summa potestate res p. quaestorem suum in coniuratione nominatum flagellauit ueste detracta subiectaque militum pedibus, quo firme uerberaturi insisterent.

(4) Simili superbia uiolentiaque ceteros tractauit ordines. inquietatus fremitu gratuita in circo loca de media nocte occupantium, omnis fustibus abegit; elisi per eum tumultum uiginti amplius equites R., totidem matronae, super innumeram turbam ceteram. scaenicis ludis, inter plebem et equitem causam discordiarum ferens, decimas maturius dabat, ut equestri <a> ab infimo quoque occuparentur. (5) gladiatorio munere reductis interdum flagrantissimo sole uelis emitti quemquam uetabat, remotoque ordinario apparatu tabidas feras, uilissimos senioque confectos gladiatores, [†]quoque paegniaris patres familiarum notos in bonam partem sed insignis debilitate aliqua corporis subiciebat. ac nonnumquam horreis praeclusis populo famem indixit.

27. Saeuitiam ingenii per haec maxime ostendit. cum ad saginam ferarum muneri praeparatarum carius pecudes compararentur, ex noxiis laniandos adnotauit, et custodiarum seriem recognoscens,

nullius inspecto elogio, stans tantum modo intra porticum mediam, a caluo ad caluum duci imperauit. (2) uotum exegit ab eo, qui pro salute sua gladiatoriam operam promiserat, spectauitque ferro dimicantem nec dimisit nisi uictorem et post multas preces. alterum, qui se periturum ea de causa uouerat, cunctantem pueris tradidit, uerbenatum infulatumque uotum reposcentes per uicos agerent, quoad praecipitaretur ex aggere. (3) multos honesti ordinis deformatos prius stigmatum notis ad metalla et munitiones uiarum aut ad bestias condemnauit aut bestiarum more quadripedes cauea coercuit aut medios serra dissecuit, nec omnes grauibus ex causis, uerum male de munere suo opinatos, uel quod numquam per genium suum deierassent. (4) parentes supplicio filiorum interesse cogeabat; quorum uni ualitudinem excusanti lecticam misit, alium a spectaculo poenae epulis statim adhibuit atque omni comitate ad hilaritatem et iocos prouocauit. curatorem munerum ac uenationum per continuos dies in conspectu suo catenis uerberatum non prius occidit quam offensus putrefacti cerebri odore. Atellan[i]ae poetam ob ambigui ioci uersiculum media amphitheatri harena igni cremauit. equitem R. obiectum feris, cum se innocentem proclamasset, reduxit abscisaque lingua rursus induxit.

28. reuocatum quendam a uetere exilio sciscitatus, quidnam ibi facere consuesset, respondente eo per adulationem: “deos semper orauit ut, quod euenit, periret Tiberius et tu imperares,” opinans sibi quoque exules suos mortem imprecari, misit circum insulas, qui uniuersos contrucidarent. cum discerpi senatorem concupisset, subornauit qui ingredientem curiam repente hostem publicum appellantes inuaderent, graphisque confossum lacerandum ceteris traderent; nec ante satiatum est quam membra et artus et uiscera hominis tracta per uicos atque ante se congesta uidisset.

29. immanissima facta augebat atrocitate uerborum. nihil magis in natura sua laudare se ac probare dicebat quam, ut ipsius uerbo utar, ὀδιστρεψίαν, hoc est inuerecundiam. monenti Antoniae auiae tamquam parum esset non oboedire: “memento,” ait, “omnia mihi et <in> omnis licere.” trucidaturus fratrem, quem metu uenenorum praemuniri medicamentis suspicabatur: “antidotum,” inquit, “aduersus Caesarem?” relegatis sororibus non solum insulas habere se, sed etiam gladios minabatur. (2) praetorium uirum ex secessu Anticyrae, quam ualitudinis causa petierat, propagari sibi commeatum saepius desiderantem cum mandasset interimi, adiecit necessariam esse sanguinis missionem, cui tam diu non prodesset elleborum. decimo quoque die numerum puniendorum ex custodia subscribens rationem se purgare dicebat. Gallis Graecisque aliquot uno tempore condemnatis gloriabatur Gallograeciam se subegisse.

30. non temere in quemquam nisi crebris et minutis ictibus

animaduerti passus est, perpetuo notoque iam praecepto: “ita feri ut se mori sentiat.” punito per errorem nominis alio quam quem destinauerat, ipsum quoque paria meruisse dixit. tragicum illud subinde iactabat:

oderint, dum metuant.

(2) saepe in cunctos pariter senatores ut Seiani clientis, ut matris ac fratrum suorum delatores, inuectus est prolatis libellis, quos crematos simulauerat, defensaque Tiberi saeuitia quasi necessaria, cum tot criminantibus credendum esset. equestrem ordinem ut scaenae harenaeque deuotum assidue proscidit. infensus turbae fauenti aduersus studium suum exclamauit: “utinam p. R. unam ceruicem haberet!” cumque Tetrinius latro postularetur, et qui postularent, Tetrinios esse ait. (3) retiari tunicati quinque numero gregatim dimicantes sine certamine ullo totidem secutoribus succubuerant; cum occidi iuberentur, unus resumpta fuscina omnes uictores interemit: hanc ut crudelissimam caedem et defleuit edicto et eos, qui spectare sustinuissent, execratus est.

31. queri etiam palam de condicione temporum suorum solebat, quod nullis calamitatibus publicis insignirentur; Augusti principatum clade Variana, Tiberi ruina spectaculorum apud Fidenas memorabilem factum, suo obliuionem imminere prosperitate rerum; atque identidem exercituum caedes, famem, pestilentiam, incendia, hiatum aliquem terrae optabat.

32. Animum quoque remittenti ludoque et epulis dedito eadem factorum dictorumque saeuitia aderat. saepe in conspectu prandentis uel comisantis seriae quaestiones per tormenta habebantur, miles decollandi artifex quibuscumque e custodia capita amputabat. Puteolis dedicatione pontis, quem excogitatum ab eo significauimus, cum multos e litore inuitasset ad se, repente omnis praecipitauit, quosdam gubernacula apprehendentes contis remisque detrusit in mare. (2) Romae publico epulo seruum ob detractam lectis argenteam laminam carnifici confestim tradidit, ut manibus abscisis atque ante pectus e collo pendentibus, praecedente titulo qui causam poenae indicaret, per coetus epulantium circumduceretur. murmillonem e ludo rudibus secum battuentem et sponte prostratum confodit ferrea sica ac more uictorum cum palma discucurrit. (3) admota altaribus uictima succinctus poparum habitu elato alte malleo cultrarium mactauit. lautiore conuiuio effusus subito in cachinnos consulibus, qui iuxta cubabant, quidnam rideret blande quaerentibus: “quid,” inquit, “nisi uno meo nutu iugulari utrumque uestrum statim posse?”

33. inter uarios iocos, cum assistens simulacro Iouis Apellen tragoedum consuluisset uter illi maior uideretur, cunctantem flagellis discidit conlaudans subinde uocem deprecantis quasi etiam in gemitu

praedulcem. quotiens uxoris uel amicalae collum exoscularetur, addebat: “tam bona ceruix simul ac iussero demetur.” quin et subinde iactabat exquisitum se uel fidiculis de Caesonia sua, cur eam tanto opere diligeret.

34. Nec minore liuore ac malignitate quam superbia saeuitiaque paene aduersus omnis aevi hominum genus grassatus est. statuas uirorum inlustrium ab Augusto ex Capitolina area propter angustias in campum Martium conlatas ita subuertit atque disiecit ut restitui saluis titulis non potuerint, uetuitque posthac uiuentium cuiquam usquam statuam aut imaginem nisi consulto et auctore se poni. (2) cogitauit etiam de Homeri carminibus abolendis, cur enim sibi non licere dicens, quod Platoni licuisset, qui eum e ciuitate quam constituebat eiecerit? sed et Vergili[i] ac Titi Liui scripta et imagines paulum afuit quin ex omnibus bibliothecis amoueret, quorum alterum ut nullius ingenii minimaeque doctrinae, alterum ut uerbosum in historia neglegentemque carpebat. de iuris quoque consultis, quasi scientiae eorum omnem usum aboliturus, saepe iactauit se mehercule effecturum ne quid respondere possint praeter eum.

35. uetera familiarum insignia nobilissimo cuique ademit, Torquato torquem, Cincinnato crinem, Cn. Pompeio stirpis antiquae Magni cognomen. Ptolemaeum, de quo ret<t>uli, et arcessitum e regno et exceptum honorifice, non alia de causa repente percussit, quam quod edente se munus ingressum spectacula conuertisse hominum oculos fulgore purpureae abollae animaduertit. (2) pulchros et comatos, quotiens sibi occurrerent, occipitio raso deturpabat. erat Aesius Proculus patre primipilari, ob egregiam corporis amplitudinem et speciem Colosseros dictus; hunc spectaculis detractum repente et in harenam deductum Thr<a>eci et mox hoplomacho comparauit bisque uictorem constringi sine mora iussit et pannis obsitum uicatim circumduci ac mulieribus ostendi, deinde iugulari. (3) nullus denique tam abiectae condicionis tamque extremae sortis fuit, cuius non commodis obtrectaret. Nemorensi regi, quod multos iam annos poteretur sacerdotio, ualidiorem aduersarium subornauit. cum quodam die muneris essedario Porio post prosperam pugnam seruum suum manumittenti studiosius plausum esset, ita proripuit se spectaculis, ut calcata lacinia togae praeceps per gradus iret, indignabundus et clamitans dominum gentium populum ex re leuissima plus honoris gladiatori tribuentem quam consecratis principibus aut praesenti sibi.



50. Statura fuit eminenti, colore expallido, corpore enormi, gracilitate maxima ceruicis et crurum, oculis et temporibus concauis, fronte lata et torua, capillo raro at circa uerticem nullo, hirsutus cetera. quare

transeunte eo prospicere ex superiore parte aut omnino quacumque de causa capram nominare, crimosum et exitiale habebatur. uultum uero natura horridum ac taetrum etiam ex industria efferabat componens ad speculum in omnem terrorem ac formidinem.

(2) Valitudo ei neque corporis neque animi constitit. puer comitiali morbo uexatus, in adulescentia ita patiens laborum erat, ut tamen nonnumquam subita defectione ingredi, stare, colligere semet ac sufferre uix posset. mentis ualitudinem et ipse senserat ac subinde de secessu deque purgando cerebro cogitauit. creditur potionatus a Caesonia uxore amatorio quidem medicamento, sed quod in furorem uerterit. (3) incitabatur insomnio maxime; neque enim plus quam tribus nocturnis horis quiescebat ac ne iis quidem placida quiete, sed pauida miris rerum imaginibus, ut qui inter ceteras pelagi quondam speciem conloquentem secum uidere uisus sit. ideoque magna parte noctis uigiliae cubandique taedio nunc toro residens, nunc per longissimas porticus uagus inuocare identidem atque expectare lucem consuebat.

51. Non inmerito mentis ualitudini attribuerim diuersissima in eodem uitia, summam confidentiam et contra nimium metum. nam qui deos tanto opere contemneret, ad minima tonitrua et fulgura coniuere, caput obuoluere, at uero maiore proripere se e strato sub lectumque condere solebat. peregrinatione quidem Siciliensi irrisis multum locorum miraculis repente a Messina noctu profugit Aetnaei uerticis fumo ac murmure pauefactus. (2) aduersus barbaros quoque minacissimus, cum trans Rhenum inter angustias densumque agmen iter essedo faceret, dicente quodam non mediocrem fore consternationem sicunde hostis appareat, equum ilico conscendit ac propere <re>uersus ad pontes, ut eos calonibus et impedimentis stipatos repperit, impatiens morae per manus ac super capita hominum translatus est. (3) mox etiam audita rebellione Germaniae fugam et subsidia fugae classes apparabat, uno solacio adquiescens transmarinas certe sibi superfuturas prouincias, si uictores Alpium iuga, ut Cimbri, uel etiam urbem, ut Senones quondam, occuparent; unde credo percussoribus eius postea consilium natum apud tumultuantes milites ementiendi, ipsum sibi manus intulisse nuntio malae pugnae perterritum.

52. Vestitu calciatuque et cetero habitu neque patrio neque ciuili, ac ne uirili quidem ac denique humano semper usus est. saepe depictas gemmatasque indutus paenulas, manuleatus et armillatus in publicum processit; aliquando sericatus et cycladatus; ac modo in crepidis uel coturnis, modo in speculatoria caliga, nonnumquam socco muliebri; plerumque uero aurea barba, fulmen tenens aut fuscina aut caduceum deorum insignia, atque etiam Veneris cultu conspectus est. triumphalem quidem ornatum etiam ante expeditionem assidue

gestauit, interdum et Magni Alexandri thoracem repetitum e conditorio eius.

53. Ex disciplinis liberalibus minimum eruditioni, eloquentiae plurimum attendit, quantumuis facundus et promptus, utique si perorandum in aliquem esset. irato et uerba et sententiae suppetebant, pronuntiatio quoque et uox, ut neque eodem loci prae ardore consisteret et exaudiretur a procul stantibus. (2) peroraturus stricturum se lucubrationis suae telum minabatur, lenius comptiusque scribendi genus adeo contemnens, ut Senecam tum maxime placentem commissiones meras componere et harenam esse sine calce diceret. solebat etiam prosperis oratorum actionibus rescribere et magnorum in senatu reorum accusationes defensionesque meditari ac, prout stilus cesserat, uel onerare sententia sua quemque uel subleuare, equestri quoque ordine ad audiendum inuitato per edicta.

54. Sed et aliorum generum artes studiosissime et diuersissimas exercuit. Thra<e>x et auriga, idem cantor atque saltator, battuebat pugnatoriis armis, aurigabat extructo plurifariam circo; canendi ac saltandi uoluptate ita efferebatur, ut ne publicis quidem spectaculis temperaret quo minus et tragoedo pronuntianti concineret et gestum histrionis quasi laudans uel corrigens palam effingeret. (2) nec alia de causa uidetur eo die, quo periit, peruigilium indixisse quam ut initium in scaenam prodeundi licentia temporis auspicaretur. saltabat autem nonnumquam etiam noctu; et quondam tres consulares secunda uigilia in Palatium accitos multaue et extrema metuentis super pulpitem conlocauit, deinde repente magno tibiaram et scabellorum crepitu cum palla tunicaque talari prosiluit ac desaltato cantico abiit. atque hic tam docilis ad cetera natare nesciit.

55. Quorum uero studio teneretur, omnibus ad insaniam fauit. Mnesterem pantomimum etiam inter spectacula osculabatur, ac si qui saltante eo uel leuiter obstreperet, detrahi iussum manu sua flagellabat. equiti R. tumultuanti per centurionem denuntiavit, abiret sine mora Ostiam perferretque ad Ptolemaeum regem in Mauretanium codicillos suos; quorum exemplum erat: “ei quem istoc misi, neque boni quicquam neque mali feceris.” (2) Thr<a>eces quosdam Germanis corporis custodibus praeposuit. murmillonum armaturas recidit. Columbo uictori, leuiter tamen saucio, uenenum in plagam addidit, quod ex eo Columbinum appellauit; sic certe inter alia uenena scriptum ab eo repertum est. prasinae factioni ita addictus et deditus, ut cenaret in stabulo assidue et maneret, agitatori Eutycho comisatione quadam in apophoretis uicies sestertium contulit. (3) Incitato equo, cuius causa pridie circenses, ne inquietaretur, uiciniae silentium per milites indicare solebat, praeter equile marmoreum et praesaepe eburneum praeterque purpurea tegumenta ac monilia e gemmis domum etiam et familiam et supellectilem dedit, quo lautius

nomine eius inuitati acciperentur; consulatum quoque traditur
destinasse.

Nero

FIDDLE WHILE ROME BURNS

Nero (A.D. 37–64)

Nero (who became emperor in A.D. 54) was much younger than any of the Caesars who preceded him—he was just sixteen years when he came to power—and so initially he had to rely on others to help rule. Especially important was his mother Agrippina the Younger, the daughter of Germanicus. Suetonius writes that Nero left to her the management of all business, public and private. He even gave out as the watchword for the Praetorian Guards, “the Best of Mothers.”

Relations between the two soon grew strained. Nero had a passion for horse-racing, acting, and singing—pursuits traditionally deemed unsuitable for Roman aristocrats and so looked down on by Agrippina. Nero drove her from the palace, had men harass her with lawsuits, and finally decided to kill her. Despite several failed attempts—one involving a booby-trapped boat—he finally succeeded.

Nero now felt free to devote himself entirely to art and athletics. In the first of the following two selections, Suetonius describes the extraordinary efforts the emperor went to. It was not enough to practice in private; he needed to compete publicly. In A.D. 64 Nero made his debut at Naples, an old Greek colony that still had a Greek character. As Nero once said, with typical vanity, “The Greeks alone are worthy of me and my efforts.” Further performances followed and by A.D. 66 the emperor felt ready to take on the circuit of festivals in Greece itself. For the first time in their eight-hundred-year history, the Olympics had to be rescheduled, to accommodate Nero’s schedule.

There was no outrage, it seemed, that Nero would not commit. After a terrible fire raged across Rome for a week or so in the summer of A.D. 64 and destroyed vast swaths of the city, Nero had grandiose plans for rebuilding, including a massive new palace for himself, the Golden House. Some came to suspect that Nero had started the fire, “disliking the ugliness of the old buildings and the narrow and twisting streets of the neighborhoods,” as Suetonius writes. And as the fire raged, he even sang an aria, “The Fall of Troy,” in full stage costume.

The last claim was probably untrue, but the popular image of Nero

fiddling while Rome burned sums up his failings as a leader. These failings are also fully on display in the second selection here, recounting Nero's death and final days. Absorbed in his own interests, unable to focus on real problems, Nero allows himself to be distracted by insults thrown at him, is easily panicked, and through his indecisiveness eventually loses all of his allies.

20. Among other subjects in his boyhood Nero was instructed also in music. The moment he became emperor, he summoned the lyre-player Terpnus, considered the best at the time, and for days on end sat by him after dinner as he sang late into the night. Little by little, Nero too began to study and practice, omitting nothing that artists of this profession are in the habit of doing to protect or strengthen the voice. He even placed a lead plate on his chest as he lay down, purged himself with enemas and vomiting, and avoided eating fruits and other harmful foods. Pleased by his progress, even though his voice was weak and husky, he eventually yearned to appear on stage, repeatedly tossing out among his friends the Greek saying "Hidden music gets no respect."

(2) He first appeared on stage at Naples and, even when the theater was rocked by an earthquake, did not stop singing until he had finished the song he had begun. He sang there often, through several days at a time. Even when he was taking a brief break to restore his voice, he could not stand being out of the limelight, but went from the baths to the theater and dined in the middle of the orchestra with a large crowd, promising them, in Greek, "If I sip a little something, I'll produce some buzz."

(3) Captivated by the rhythmical cheers of some Alexandrians who had come to Naples from a newly arrived convoy, he summoned more from Alexandria. With equal enthusiasm he selected young men of the equestrian order as well as more than 5,000 men from the general body of citizens who were at peak military age. Divided into squads, they learned the various methods of clapping—they were called "the bees," "the roof-tiles," and "the bricks"—and they really threw themselves into it when he sang. They were easily recognized by their very thick hair and fabulous clothes and by the absence of rings on their left hands.¹ Their leaders earned 400,000 sesterces each.

21. Since he attached great value to singing at Rome too, he had the Neronian Games repeated before the regularly scheduled date.² When everyone clamored for his divine voice, he replied that he would provide an opportunity for those who wished at his estate. But when the military guard then on duty added to the appeals of the ordinary people, he cheerfully offered to perform straightaway. Without delay, he ordered his name entered on the list of lyre-players who were competing, he drew lots with the others, and he appeared when it was his turn. With him were his praetorian prefects holding the lyre, behind them the tribunes of the soldiers, and close by his nearest friends. (2) When he took his place and got through the standard introduction, he announced, through the former consul Cluvius Rufus, that he would sing the role of Niobe and he kept going with it until late afternoon.³ He then put off the crowning and the rest

of the contest until the following year, so that he would have an opportunity to sing further.

But as this started to seem too far off, he kept performing again and again. He even flirted with the idea of appearing as an actor in privately-given shows when one of the praetors offered him 1,000,000 sesterces. (3) He also sang tragedies, taking the part of heroes and gods, even heroines and goddesses, fashioning the masks to resemble his own face or the face of whichever woman he was in love with at the time. Among other parts he sang Canace in childbirth, Orestes the matricide, Oedipus blinded, and the mad Hercules. In this last play, the story goes, when a newly recruited soldier assigned to guard the entrance saw Nero outfitted and bound up with chains, as the plot demanded, he ran to his assistance.

22. He was especially inflamed with a passion for horses from his earliest years and talked a great deal about races in the Circus, even though he was forbidden to. When his tutor scolded him once for complaining to his fellow students that a charioteer of the Greens had been dragged along on the ground, Nero lied and said that he was talking about Hector.⁴ But then, in the early days of his rule, he would play every day with ivory chariots on a gaming table and would come up from his country retreat to all of the races in the Circus, even the smallest ones, first secretly, then fully in the open, so that nobody would doubt that he would be there on that particular day. (2) Nor did he hide his wish to see the number of prizes increased. As a result, races were added and the contests dragged on to a late hour. Even the managers of the racing clubs no longer thought it worth bringing out their companies unless it was for a whole day.

Soon he wished to drive chariots himself and to do so publicly and often. After a preliminary attempt on his estate before an audience of slaves and common people, he let everyone watch him in the Circus Maximus.⁵ A freedman of his dropped the signal-cloth from where the magistrates were accustomed to.

(3) Not content with having given displays of these arts at Rome, he set out for Greece, as we have said, moved very much by the following circumstance.⁶ The communities where musical contests were customarily put on had adopted the practice of sending all of their crowns for the lyre-players to him. He was so happy to get these, he not only gave the envoys who had brought them the first audience of the day, he even invited them to private dinners. When some of them asked him to sing over dinner and then applauded effusively, he said: "The Greeks alone know how to listen and they alone are worthy of me and my efforts."

He promptly set out. As soon as he reached Cassiope, he immediately began singing at the altar of Zeus Cassius. He then made

the round of all the contests.

23. He ordered those which happen at widely different times to be moved into a single year—some were even repeated—and at Olympia he also arranged a musical competition contrary to established practice there. To prevent anything distracting or occupying his attention while he was focused on these pursuits, when his freedman Helius warned him that affairs in Rome required his presence, he replied: “However much you advise and wish that I return quickly, you ought rather to counsel and to hope that I return worthy of Nero.”

(2) When he was singing, it was not permitted to leave the theater, even in an emergency. And so some women, it is said, gave birth during his shows. It is also said that when the exits of the theater were sealed, many persons, wearied with listening and applauding, jumped secretly from the theater wall or pretended to be dead and were carried out for burial.

His fear and anxiety in competing, his intense jealousy of his rivals, and his dread of the judges can hardly be believed. He considered his opponents to be in exactly the same category as he; he would show respect to them and try to gain their favor, while he slandered them behind their backs, sometimes assailed them with insults in person, and even bribed any who were particularly talented. (3) Furthermore, he would address the judges most respectfully before he began, saying that he had done everything that could be done, but the outcome was in Fortune’s hands; they, like the wise and experienced men they were, must exclude accidents. When they encouraged him to take heart, he withdrew in a calmer mood, but even still had some worry, construing the silence and reticence of some of them as sourness and hostility and saying he was suspicious of them.

24. Still, he so strictly observed the rules in competition that he never dared clear his throat and only wiped the sweat from his brow with his arm.⁷ In one performance of a tragedy, when his scepter slipped and he quickly picked it up again, he trembled with fear that he would be disqualified from the competition for his error. He only took courage when an actor swore that amid all the cheers and cries of applause, it had not been noticed. But in fact, he himself would make the announcement that he was the winner, and for this reason he entered into the contest of the heralds everywhere. So that no memory or trace of any other victor in the games would remain, he ordered all their statues and portraits knocked over, dragged away with a hook, and cast into the latrines.

(2) He also drove chariots in many places, at Olympia even one with ten horses—although in one of his poems he had criticized King Mithridates for this very thing.⁸ Yet when he was thrown from it and

then couldn't stay on after he had gotten back on, he gave up before the final course—but still was crowned the winner. On his departure, he granted the entire province its freedom. He also gave the judges Roman citizenship as well as a great deal of money. Standing in the middle of the stadium on the day of the Isthmian Games, he personally announced these rewards.

25. He returned from Greece to Naples, because it was in this city that he had first displayed his art. He entered on white horses through a breach made in the city wall, as is customary for victors in Greek games. He made similar entries into Antium, then Albanum, then Rome. But at Rome, he was on the chariot on which Augustus had once ridden in triumph and he wore a purple robe and Greek cloak spangled with gold stars; he bore the Olympic crown on his head, the Pythian in his right hand, while all the rest were carried before him in a parade with placards stating where he had won, over whom, and with what song or play.⁹ His cheering squad followed like participants in a triumphal parade, shouting: "We are the Augustiani, the soldiers of his triumph." (2) Then, having had an arch in the Circus Maximus taken down, he passed through the Velabrum and the Forum and went to the Palatine and Temple of Apollo. As he made his way, sacrificial victims were slaughtered here and there, the streets were continually sprayed with perfume, and birds, streamers, and sweets were showered on him. He placed the sacred crowns in his private apartments around his couches and also set up statues of himself in the costume of a lyre-player—a design he used on his coinage too.

(3) Far from giving up or relaxing his study after this, to preserve his voice, he never addressed soldiers except in writing or if there was somebody else to read his words. Nor did he do anything, serious or fun, unless his singing teacher was standing nearby to warn him to spare his vocal organs and dab a cloth on his face to wipe off perspiration. To many men he offered friendship, or declared an enmity, based on how much, or how little, they had praised him.



40. After putting up with an emperor like this for just under fourteen years, the world finally abandoned him. The Gauls got the process started, under the leadership of Julius Vindex, who at the time served as governor there.

(2) Astrologers had predicted to Nero that he would one day be removed, which gave rise to that very famous saying of his: "Our art sustains us." The remark doubtless was aimed to win him indulgence for studying lyre-playing—a pleasure for him as emperor, but for a private citizen a necessity. Some of the astrologers, though, had promised him dominion in the East, even when he was abandoned,

with a few specially mentioning rule over Jerusalem; more said that all of his earlier fortunes would be restored. He was more inclined to hope for the latter and thought that after having lost Britain and Armenia and then gained each of them back, he had lived through the destined hardships. (3) He consulted the oracle of Apollo at Delphi and was told he should beware the seventy-third year. Thinking he would die only then, and failing to make any connection to the age of Galba, he had great faith that he not only would live to an old age, but also always have singular good fortune.¹⁰ After losing some very valuable objects in a shipwreck, he told his friends, with a straight face, "The fish will bring them back to me."

(4) He learned about the rising of the Gallic provinces in Naples, on the anniversary of the day he had killed his mother. He took the news so calmly and coolly that he even aroused suspicion that he was rejoicing at the opportunity to plunder some very rich provinces according to the laws of war. He immediately made his way to the gymnasium and became deeply engrossed watching the athletes compete. Interrupted at dinner, too, by a more disturbing letter, he showed no more anger than to threaten punishment on those who had rebelled. In short, for eight days running he did not try to write back to anyone, nor make any orders or instructions, but buried the whole affair in silence.

41. Finally, the stream of abusive edicts from Vindex got to him and he urged the Senate in a letter to avenge him and the state—while pleading a sore throat as the reason he was not there. Yet nothing pained him so much as being criticized as a bad lyre-player and being called Ahenobarbus instead of Nero. He announced that while his family name had been thrown in his face as an insult, he would resume using it, laying aside his adoptive name.¹¹ But the other attacks he rebutted as false, with the sole argument that he was being accused of lack of skill in an art which he had worked so hard on and perfected. He kept asking people individually, "Do you know anyone who is better?"

(2) Yet as urgent message came on top of urgent message, he returned to Rome in great fear. On the journey, his mood was slightly lifted by a silly omen: when he saw carved on a monument a Gallic soldier beaten by a Roman cavalryman and dragged by the hair, he jumped for joy at the sight and worshipped the heavens.

Not even at this time did he address the Senate or People in person. Instead, he called some of the leading men to his house and, after a hasty consultation, he spent the rest of the day leading them around water organs of a new and previously unknown type. He showed the organs one by one, explaining at length how each one worked and its complexity. "I will put all of them on display in the

theater,” he even promised, “if Vindex allows it.”

42. Then, after learning that Galba and the Spanish provinces also had rebelled, he fainted. He lay dumbstruck for a long time without speaking a word, practically dead. When he came to his senses, he tore his clothes, struck his head, and announced that he was finished. His nurse tried to console him, reminding him that similar things had happened to other emperors before, and he replied: “In comparison with the others, I suffer something unheard of and unknown: I am losing supreme power while still alive.”

(2) Nevertheless, in no way did he cut back on or eliminate his customary luxury and laziness. On the contrary, whenever some agreeable news had reached him from the provinces, over a lavish dinner he would perform ribald songs about the leaders of the revolt, set to lewd music, and accompanied with gestures: these became widely known. Secretly brought into the seating area of a theater, he sent a message to an actor who was attracting applause: “You’re taking advantage of my being tied up with public duties.”

43. When the revolt first broke out, Nero is believed to have made many frightful plans, though they were in keeping with his nature. He intended to send out successors and murderers of those who were ruling provinces and armies, on the grounds that these men were all of one mind and conspiring against him. He intended to slay all exiles everywhere and all men from Gaul in the city of Rome—the former, so that they could not join those in rebellion, and the latter, on the grounds that they were aware of their countrymen’s plans and supported them. And he intended to turn over the Gallic provinces to his armies for plundering, to murder the entire Senate with poison at banquets, and to set fire to Rome after unleashing wild animals on the people so that it would be that much harder for them to defend themselves.

(2) But he was deterred, not so much by remorse as despair that he could carry these things out. Believing that an expedition was necessary, he deprived the consuls of office before their term was over and in their place took up the consulship alone, on the grounds that it was fated that the Gallic provinces could be defeated only by a consul. When, after dinner, he left his couch and took up his fasces, he leaned on the shoulders of his friends and said, “As soon as I reach the province, I will present myself unarmed before the armies and do nothing but weep. After the rebels are brought to remorse, on the following day, I will rejoice with them and sing victory songs, which reminds me . . . I should be composing them now.”

44. In preparing his expedition, he took most care in choosing carts to carry organs for the theater and in giving the concubines he was bringing with him masculine haircuts and equipping them with the

battle-axes and shields of Amazons. Next, he summoned the city-dwellers of Rome to military service. When nobody suitable responded, he required slave-owners to provide a fixed number of slaves. He accepted only the best from each household and did not even make exceptions for accountants or secretaries. (2) He also ordered all classes to surrender part of their property and, in addition, the tenants of private buildings and apartment blocks to pay at once their annual rent. With excessive fastidiousness and severity, he demanded coins in mint condition, silver that was the purest, and gold of the finest quality, with the result that many men openly refused to pay all of their tribute and there were widespread demands that, instead, whatever rewards the informers had received should be recovered.

45. Hostility to him also grew because he was making a profit out of the high price of grain. As luck would have it, during a general shortage of food, word went out that a ship from Alexandria had arrived, carrying a load of sand for the wrestlers of Nero's court.

(2) As a result, everyone's hatred for him increased and there was no insult he did not endure. On a statue of him, a lock of hair was attached to his forehead, with the Greek inscription: "Now finally you have competition: throw in the towel!"¹² On the neck of another, a leather bag was tied, along with a sign: "I did what I could, but you deserve the sack."¹³ And on columns it was written: "Nero's singing has awoken even the Gauls."¹⁴ At night, many pretended to have altercations with their slaves and kept calling out for a "Vindicator."¹⁵

46. He also was terrified by clear signs of what was to come, in dreams and auspices and omens, old and new alike. Although never previously in the habit of dreaming, just after he killed his mother he had a vision in his sleep that he was piloting a ship and the steering oar was wrenched away from him. He dreamt that he was being dragged by his wife Octavia into thickest darkness and now was being crowded in by a multitude of winged ants, now surrounded by the statues of the nations dedicated at the Theater of Pompey and blocked from moving forward. And he dreamt that a Spanish horse in which he took the greatest delight was, in its lower parts, transformed into a monkey; only its head was intact and it let out melodious neighs.

(2) The doors of the Mausoleum spontaneously burst open and from within a voice was heard summoning him by name. On New Year's Day, lavishly-decorated Lares fell down amid the preparations for the sacrifice.¹⁶ As Nero was taking the auspices, Sporus made the gift of a ring, the stone of which was engraved with the rape of Persephone.¹⁷ When vows were being made and a great throng of people of all ranks had gathered, the keys of the Capitol could not be found for a long time.¹⁸ (3) A speech of Nero attacking Vindex was

being read out in the Senate which said that the wretches would pay the penalty and meet their just deserts soon, at which everyone shouted: "You will do it, Augustus!" It also had not gone unnoticed that the last play that he had sung publicly was *Oedipus in Exile* and he had ended with this line: "Wife, mother, father, force me to die."

47. Meanwhile, after the defection of the other armies was reported, he tore to pieces the letters that had been presented to him while he was dining. He overturned the table and dashed to the ground two cups that he particularly treasured and called "Homeric" because they were engraved with scenes from the poems of Homer. He then took some poison from Lucusta, placed it in a golden box, and made his way to the Servilian Gardens. Having sent his most loyal freedmen ahead to Ostia to prepare a fleet, he tried to get the tribunes and centurions of the Praetorian Guard to join his flight. (2) But some of them hung back, others openly turned on him, and one of them even shouted: "Is it so wretched a thing to die?"¹⁹

He considered a variety of plans. Should he go as a suppliant to the Parthians or Galba? Or appear publicly in mourning and plead for forgiveness for his past actions as pitifully as possible from the speaker's platform? If he could not change their minds, at least he might beg for the prefecture of Egypt to be assigned to him. A speech to this effect was later found in his desk. But it is thought that he was frightened off from giving it because, before he could make it to the Forum, he would be torn to pieces.

(3) And so he put off a decision to the next day. Around midnight, he was woken up, when he realized that his military guard had left. He jumped out of his bed, sent for his friends, and, when he heard nothing from any of them, personally visited each of their lodgings with a few people. But everyone's doors had been locked and nobody was answering. He returned to his bedroom. Even the bodyguards there had fled, all of the bedding was removed, and the box of poison had been taken away. At once he sought out the gladiator Spiculus, or any other assassin, to kill him and found no one. "And so," he said, "I have neither friend nor enemy?" He rushed out with the intention of throwing himself into the Tiber.

48. But then he changed his mind again and all he wanted was some secluded hiding-place so that he could recover his courage. The freedman Phaon offered a villa of his, between the Salarian and Nomentanan Roads, about four miles out. Barefoot and in a tunic as he was, Nero threw on a dingy old cloak with a hood. With his head covered and a handkerchief draped in front of his face, he climbed on a horse. Only four people accompanied him, one of whom was Sporus.

(2) Suddenly the earth shook and lightning flashed in Nero's face, filling him with terror.

He heard from the nearby camp the cries of soldiers making predictions unfavorable to him and favorable to Galba. He also heard one of the travelers he met on the road saying: "These men are pursuing Nero" and another asking: "Is there any news in Rome of Nero?" But then his horse was disturbed by the smell of a corpse abandoned on the road, his face was exposed, and he was recognized by a discharged praetorian who saluted him.

(3) When they reached the lane leading to the villa, they dismissed their horses. Nero made his way between shrubs and brambles, along a path through a thicket. It was difficult going. Clothes had to be spread for Nero to walk on. He reached the rear wall of the villa and there Phaon urged him to hide for the time being in a pit from which the sand had been dug out, but Nero declared: "I will not go beneath the earth as long as I'm alive!" Waiting for a while, until a secret way into the villa could be prepared, he scooped up some water from a nearby pool to drink and said, "This is Nero's ice-cold water."²⁰

(4) Then, his cloak having been torn by prickly bushes, he pulled out the twigs that were stuck in it. Like an animal on all fours, he crawled through the narrow passage that had been dug out and made it into the closest room, where he lay down on a bed made up of a thin mattress and an old blanket. He was hungry and, once again, thirsty. He rejected the coarse piece of bread handed to him but he did drink a little warm water.

49. Then everyone around him insisted that he save himself as quickly as possible from the insulting treatment that lay in store for him. He ordered that a hole be dug, as he looked on, with dimensions that would fit his body. Whatever pieces of marble could be found were to be gathered up, and water and wood brought so that his corpse could be disposed of later. He cried at each thing as it happened and kept saying: "What an artist dies with me!"

(2) Meanwhile, a letter was brought to Phaon by one of the couriers. Nero snatched it and read that the Senate had declared him an enemy and was searching for him so that he could be punished in the ancient fashion. He asked what sort of punishment that was. When he learned that the guilty party was stripped, hung by the neck from a large fork, and flogged to death with rods, he took fright, snatched the two daggers which he had brought with him, tested the blade of each, but then put them back, making the excuse that the fated hour had not yet come.

(3) Now he urged Sporus to start grieving and wailing, now he begged that somebody would help him to take his life by setting an example. At moments he chided himself for his inability to take action: "I live: a disgrace, a shame . . . this does not suit Nero, it does not . . . one must show resolution in such situations . . . come, rouse

yourself!" And now, the horsemen who had been ordered to take him alive were drawing near. When he realized this, he said in fright: "The thunder of fast-running horses beats against my ears."²¹

Then, with the help of his secretary Epaphroditus, he drove a blade in his throat. (4) As he was still half-alive, a centurion burst in and placed a cloak on the wound, pretending that he had come to help. Nero merely replied: "It's too late" and "Such loyalty." With these words he died, his eyes bulging and fixed in a stare, causing terror in all who looked at him.

His first and only request of his companions had been that they not allow anyone to get hold of his head but they cremate him entire, by whatever means possible. This was allowed by Icelus, the freedman of Galba, who not long before had been released from custody, after being detained when the revolt first broke out.

50. Nero was buried, at a cost of 200,000 sesterces, with white robes interwoven with gold that he had worn on New Year's Day. His nurses Egloge and Alexandria, along with his concubine Acte, interred his remains in the family monument of the Domitii: sitting atop the hill of the Hortuli, it is visible from the Field of Mars. In this monument he had a sarcophagus of porphyry, with an altar of Luna marble resting atop it, all surrounded by marble from Thasus. (*Nero* 20–25 and 40–50)

20. Inter ceteras disciplinas pueritiae tempore imbutus et musica, statim ut imperium adeptus est, Terpnium citharoedum uigentem tunc praeter alios arcessiit diebusque continuis post cenam canenti in multam noctem assidens paulatim et ipse meditari exercerique coepit neque eorum quicquam omittere, quae generis eius artifices uel conseruandae uocis causa uel augendae factitarent; sed et plumbeam chartam supinus pectore sustinere et clystere uomituque purgari et abstinere pomis cibisque officientibus; donec blandiente profectu, quamquam exiguae uocis et fuscae, prodire in scaenam concupiit, subinde inter familiares Graecum prouerbium iactans occultae musicae nullum esse respectum. (2) et prodit Neapoli primum ac ne concusso quidem repente motu terrae theatro ante cantare destitit, quam incohatum absolueret nomon. ibidem saepius et per complures cantauit dies; sumpto etiam ad reficiendam uocem breui tempore, impatiens secreti a balineis in theatrum transiit mediaque in orchestra frequente populo epulatus, si paulum subbibisset, aliquid se suffritinnitum Graeco sermone promisit. (3) captus autem modulatis Alexandrinorum laudationibus, qui de nouo commeatu Neapolim confluxerant, plures Alexandria euocauit. neque eo segnius adulescentulos equestris ordinis et quinque amplius milia e plebe robustissimae iuuentutis undique elegit, qui diuisi in factiones plausuum genera condiscerent—bombos et imbrices et testas uocabant—operamque nauarent cantanti sibi, insignes pinguiissima coma et excellentissimo cultu, pu[e]ris ac sine anulo laeuis, quorum duces quadringena milia sestertia merebant.

21. Cum magni aestimaret cantare etiam Romae, Neroneum agona ante praestitutam diem reuocauit flagitantibusque cunctis caelestem uocem respondit quidem in hortis se copiam uolentibus facturum, sed adiuuante uulgi preces etiam statione militum, quae tunc excubabat, repraesentaturum se pollicitus est libens; ac sine mora nomen suum in albo profitentium citharoedorum iussit ascribi sorticulaque in urnam cum ceteris demissa intrauit ordine suo, simul praefecti praetorii citharam sustinentes, post tribuni militum iuxtaque amicorum intimi. (2) utque constitit, peracto principio, Niobam se cantaturum per Cluium Rufum consularem pronuntiauit et in horam fere decimam perseuerauit coronamque eam et reliquam certaminis partem in annum sequentem distulit, ut saepius canendi occasio esset. quod cum tardum uideretur, non cessauit identidem se publicare. dubitauit etiam an priuatis spectaculis operam inter scaenicos daret quodam praetorum sestertium decies offerente. (3) tragoedias quoque cantauit personatus heroum deorumque, item heroidum ac dearum, personis effectis ad similitudinem oris sui et feminae, prout quamque diligeret. inter cetera cantauit Canac[h]en parturientem, Oresten matricidam, Oedipodem excaecatam, Herculem insanum. in qua fabula fama est

tirunculum militem positum ad custodiam aditus, cum eum ornari ac uinciri catenis, sicut argumentum postulabat, uideret, accurrisse ferendae opis gratia.

22. Equorum studio uel praecipue ab ineunte aetate flagrauit plurimusque illi sermo, quanquam uetaretur, de circensibus erat; et quondam tractum prasini agitorem inter condiscipulos querens, obiurgante paedagogo, de Hectore se loqui ementitus est. sed cum inter initia imperii eburneis quadrigis cotidie in abaco luderet, ad omnis etiam minimos circenses e secessu commeabat, primo clam, deinde propalam, ut nemini dubium esset eo die utique affuturum. (2) neque dissimulabat uelle se palmarum numerum ampliari; quare spectaculum multiplicatis missibus in serum protrahabatur, ne dominis quidem iam factionum dignantibus nisi ad totius diei cursum greges ducere. mox et ipse aurigare atque etiam spectari saepius uoluit positoque in hortis inter seruitia et sordidam plebem rudimento uniuersorum se oculis in circo maximo praebuit, aliquo liberto mittente mappam unde magistratus solent. (3) nec contentus harum artium experimenta Romae dedisse, Achaia, ut diximus, petit hinc maxime motus. instituerant ciuitates, apud quas musici agones edi solent, omnes citharoedorum coronas ad ipsum mittere. eas adeo grate recipiebat, ut legatos, qui pertulissent, non modo primos admitteret, sed etiam familiaribus epulis interponeret. a quibusdam ex his rogatus ut cantaret super cenam, exceptusque effusius, solos scire audire Graecos solosque se et studiis suis dignos ait. nec profectione dilata, ut primum Cassiopen traiecit, statim ad aram Iouis Cassii cantare auspicatus certamina deinceps obiit omnia.

23. nam et quae diuersissimorum temporum sunt, cogi in unum annum, quibusdam etiam iteratis, iussit et Olympiae quoque praeter consuetudinem musicum agona commisit. ac ne quid circa haec occupatum auocaret detineretue, cum praesentia eius urticas res egere a liberto Helio admoneretur, rescripsit his uerbis: “quamuis nunc tuum consilium sit et uotum celeriter reuerti me, tamen suadere et optare potius debes, ut Nerone dignus reuertar.”

(2) Cantante eo ne necessaria quidem causa excedere theatro licitum est. itaque et enixae quaedam in spectaculis dicuntur et multi taedio audiendi laudandique clausis oppidorum portis aut furtim desiluisse de muro aut morte simulata funere elati. quam autem trepide anxieque certauerit, quanta aduersariorum aemulatione, quo metu iudicum, uix credi potest. aduersarios, quasi plane condicionis eiusdem, obseruare, captare, infamare secreto, nonnumquam ex occurso maledictis incessere ac, si qui arte praecellerent, conrumpere etiam solebat. (3) iudices autem prius quam inciperet reuerentissime adloquebatur, omnia se facienda fecisse, sed euentum in manu esse Fortuna; illos ut sapientis et doctos uiros fortuita debere excludere;

atque, ut auderet hortantibus, aequiore animo recedebat, ac ne sic quidem sine sollicitudine, taciturnitatem pudoremque quorundam pro tristitia et malignitate arguens suspectosque sibi dicens.

24. in certando uero ita legi oboediebat, ut numquam excreare ausus sudorem quoque frontis brachio detergeret, atque etiam in tragico quodam actu, cum elapsum baculum cito resumpsisset, pauidus et metuens ne ob delictum certamine summoueretur, non aliter confirmatus est quam adiurante hypocrita non animaduersum id inter exultationes succlamationesque populi. uictorem autem se ipse pronuntiabat; qua de causa et praeconio ubique contendit. ac ne cuius alterius hieronicarum memoria aut uestigium extaret usquam, subuerti et unco trahi abicique in latrinas omnium statuas et imagines imperauit. (2) aurigauit quoque plurifariam, Olympiis uero etiam decemiugem, quamuis id ipsum in rege Mithradate carmine quodam suo reprehendisset; sed excussus curru ac rursus repositus, cum perdurare non posset, destitit ante decursum; neque eo setius coronatus est. decedens deinde prouinciam uniuersam libertate donauit simulque iudices ciuitate Romana et pecunia grandi. quae beneficia e medio stadio Isthmiorum die sua ipse uoce pronuntiauit.

25. Reuersus e Graecia Neapolim, quod in ea primum artem protulerat, albis equis introiit disiecta parte muri, ut mos hieronicarum est; simili modo Antium, inde Albanum, inde Romam; sed et Romam eo curru, quo Augustus olim triumphauerat, et in ueste purpurea distinctaque stellis aureis chlamyde coronamque capite gerens Olympicam, dextra manu Pythiam, praeunte pompa ceterarum cum titulis, ubi et quos quo cantionum quoque fabularum argumento uicisset; sequentibus currum ouantium ritu plausoribus, Augustianos militesque se triumphi eius clamitantibus. (2) dehinc diruto circi maximi arcu per Velabrum forumque Palatium et Apollinem petit. incedenti passim uictimae caesae sparso per uias identidem croco ingestaeque aues ac lemnisci et bellaria. sacras coronas in cubiculis circum lectos posuit, item statuas suas citharoedico habitu, qua nota etiam nummum percussit. (3) ac post haec tantum afuit a remittendo laxandoque studio, ut conseruandae uocis gratia neque milites umquam, nisi absens aut alio uerba pronuntiante, appellaret neque quicquam serio iocoue egerit, nisi astante phonasco, qui moneret parceret arteriis ac sudarium ad os applicaret; multisque uel amicitiam suam optulerit uel simultatem indixerit, prout quisque se magis parciusue laudasset.



40. Talem principem paulo minus quattuordecim annos perpressus terrarum orbis tandem destituit, initium facientibus Gallis duce Iulio Vindice, qui tum eam prouinciam pro praetore optinebat.

(2) Praedictum a mathematicis Neroni olim erat fore ut quandoque destitueretur; unde illa uox eius celeberrima: τὸ τέχνηον ἡμῶς διατρέφει, quo maiore scilicet uenia medicaretur citharoedicam artem, principi sibi gratam, priuato necessariam. spoponderant tamen quidam destituto Orientis dominationem, nonnulli nominatim regnum Hierosolymorum, plures omnis pristinae fortunae restitutionem. cui spei pronior, Britannia Armeniaque amissa ac rursus utraque recepta, defunctum se fatalibus malis existimabat. (3) ut uero consulto Delphis Apolline septuagensimum ac tertium annum cauendum sibi audiuit, quasi eo demum obiturus, ac nihil coniectans de aetate Galbae, tanta fiducia non modo senectam sed etiam perpetuam singularemque concepit felicitatem, ut amissis naufragio pretiosissimis rebus non dubitauerit inter suos dicere pisces eas sibi relatueros.

(4) Neapoli de motu Galliarum cognouit die ipso quo matrem occiderat, adeoque lente ac secure tulit ut gaudentis etiam suspicionem praeberet tamquam occasione nata spoliandarum iure belli opulentissimarum prouinciarum; statimque in gymnasium progressus certantis athletas effusissimo studio spectauit. cenae quoque tempore interpellatus tumultuosioribus litteris hactenus excanduit, ut malum iis qui descissent minaretur. denique per octo continuos dies non rescribere cuiquam, non mandare quid aut praecipere conatus rem silentio oblit[t]erauit.

41. edictis tandem Vindicis contumeliosis et frequentibus permotus senatum epistula in ultionem sui reique publicae adhortatus est, excusato languore faucium, propter quem non adesset. nihil autem aequae doluit, quam ut malum se citharoedum increpitum ac pro Nerone Ahenobarbum appellatum; et nomen quidem gentile, quod sibi per contumeliam exprobraretur, resumpturum se professus est deposito adoptiuo, cetera conuicia, ut falsa, non alio argumento refellebat, quam quod etiam inscitia sibi tanto opere <e>laboratae perfectaeque a se artis obiceretur, singulos subinde rogans, nossentne quemquam praestantiorum. (2) sed urgentibus aliis super alios nuntiis Romam praetrepidus rediit; leuiterque modo in itinere friuolo auspicio mente recreata, cum adnotasset insculptum monumento militem Gallum ab equite R. oppressum trahi crinibus, ad eam speciem exiluit gaudio caelumque adorauit. ac ne tunc quidem aut senatu aut populo coram appellato quosdam e primoribus uiris domum euocauit transactaque raptim consultatione reliquam diei partem per organa <h>ydraulica noui et ignoti generis circumduxit, ostendensque singula, de ratione ac difficultate cuiusque disserens, iam se etiam prolaturum omnia in theatrum affirmauit, si per Vindicem liceat.

42. Postquam deinde etiam Galbam et Hispanias descuiisse cognouit, conlapsus animoque male facto diu sine uoce et prope intermortuus iacuit, utque resipuit, ueste discissa, capite conuerberato,

actum de se pronuntiauit consolantique nutriculae et aliis quoque iam principibus similia accidisse memoranti, se uero praeter ceteros inaudita et incognita pati respondit, qui summum imperium uiuus amitteret. (2) nec eo setius quicquam ex consuetudine luxus atque desidiae omisit uel inminuit; quin immo, cum prosperi quiddam ex prouinciis nuntiatum esset, super abundantissimam cenam iocularia in defectionis duces carmina lasciuieque modulata, quae uulgo notuerunt, etiam gesticulatus est; ac spectaculis theatri clam inlatus cuidam scaenico placenti nuntium misit abuti eum occupationibus suis.

43. Initio statim tumultus multa et inmania, uerum non abhorrentia a natura sua creditur destinasse: successores percussoresque summittere exercitus et prouincias regentibus, quasi conspiratis idemque et unum sentientibus; quidquid ubique exulum, quidquid in urbe hominum Gallicanorum esset contrucidare, illos ne desciscentibus adgregarentur, hos ut conscios popularium suorum atque fautores; Gallias exercitibus diripiendas permittere; senatum uniuersum ueneno per conuiuia necare; urbem incendere feris in populum immissis, quo difficilius defenderentur. (2) sed absterritus non tam paenitentia quam perficiendi desperatione credensque expeditionem necessariam, consules ante tempus priuauit honore atque in utriusque locum solus iniit consulatum, quasi fatale esset non posse Gallias debellari nisi a consule. ac susceptis fascibus cum post epulas triclinio digrederetur, innixus umeris familiarium affirmauit, simul ac primum prouinciam attigisset, inermem se in conspectum exercituum proditurum nec quicquam aliud quam fleturum, reuocatisque ad paenitentiam defectoribus insequenti die laetum inter laetos cantaturum epinicia, quae iam nunc sibi componi oporteret.

44. In praeparanda expeditione primam curam habuit deligendi uehicula portandis scaenicis organis concubinasque, quas secum educeret, tondendi ad uirilem modum et securibus peltisque Amazonicis instruendi. mox tribus urbanas ad sacramentum citauit ac nullo idoneo respondente certum dominis seruorum numerum indixit; nec nisi ex tota cuiusque familia probatissimos, ne dispensatoribus quidem aut amanuensibus exceptis, recepit. (2) partem etiam census omnes ordines conferre iussit et insuper inquilinos priuatarum aedium atque insularum pensionem annuam repraesentare fisco; exegitque ingenti fastidio et acerbitate nummum asperum, argentum pustulatum, aurum ad obrussam, ut plerique omnem collationem palam recusarent, consensu flagitantes a delatoribus potius reuocanda praemia quaecumque cepissent.

45. ex annonae quoque caritate lucranti[a] adcreuit inuidia; nam et forte accidit, ut in publica fame Alexandrina naus nuntiaretur puluerem luctatoribus aulicis aduexisse.

(2) Quare omnium in se odio incitato nihil contumeliarum defuit

quin subiret. statuae eius a uertice cirrus appositus est cum inscriptione Graeca: nunc demum agona esse, et traderet tandem. alterius collo ascopa deligata simulque titulus: “ego quod potui, sed tu culleum meruisti.” ascriptum et columnis, etiam Gallos eum cantando excitasse. iam noctibus iurgia cum seruis plerique simulantes crebro Vindicem poscebant.

46. Terrebat ad hoc euidentibus portentis somniorum et auspiciorum et ominum, cum ueteribus tum nouis. numquam antea somniare solitus occisa demum matre uidit per quietem nauem sibi regenti extortum gubernaculum trahique se ab Octauia uxore in artissimas tenebras et modo pinnatarum formicarum multitudine oppleri, modo a simulacris gentium ad Pompei theatrum dedicatarum circumiri arcerique progressu; asturconem, quo maxime laetabatur, posteriore corporis parte in simiae speciem transfiguratum ac tantum capite integro hinnitus edere canoros. (2) de Mausoleo, sponte foribus patefactis, exaudita uox est nomine eum cientis. Kal. Ian. exornati Lares in ipso sacrificii apparatu conciderunt; auspicanti Sporus anulum muneri optulit, cuius gemmae sculptura erat Proserpinae raptus; uotorum nuncupatione, magna iam ordinum frequentia, uix repertae Capitolii clauēs. (3) cum ex oratione eius, qua in Vindicem perorabat, recitaretur in senatu daturos poenas sceleratos ac breui dignum exitum facturos, conclamatum est ab uniuersis: “tu facies, Auguste.” obseruatum etiam fuerat nouissimam fabulam cantasse eum publice Oedipodem exulem atque in hoc desisse uersu:

θανεῖν μ' [ε] ἄνωγε σύγγαμος, μήτηρ, πατήρ.

47. Nuntiata interim etiam ceterorum exercituum defectione litteras prandenti sibi redditas concerpsit, mensam subuertit, duos scyphos gratissimi usus, quos Homerios a caelatura carminum Homeri uocabat, solo inlisit ac sumpto a Lucusta ueneno et in auream pyxidem condito transiit in hortos Seruilianos, ubi praemissis libertorum fidissimis Ostiam ad classem praeparandam tribunos centurionesque praetorii de fugae societate temptauit. (2) sed partim tergiuersantibus, partim aperte detrectantibus, uno uero etiam proclamante:

usque adeone mori miserum est?

uarie agitauit, Parthosne an Galbam supplex peteret, an atratus prodiret in publicum proque rostris quanta maxima posset miseratione ueniam praeteritorum precaretur, ac ni flexisset animos, uel Aegypti praefecturam concedi sibi oraret. inuentus est postea in scrinio eius hac de re sermo formatus; sed deterritum putant, ne prius quam in forum perueniret discerneretur.

(3) Sic cogitatione in posterum diem dilata ad mediam fere noctem

excitatus, ut comperit stationem militum recessisse, prosiluit e lecto misitque circum amicos, et quia nihil a quoquam renuntiabatur, ipse cum paucis hospitia singulorum adiit. uerum clausis omnium foribus, respondente nullo, in cubiculum rediit, unde iam et custodes diffugerant, direptis etiam stragulis, amota et pyxide ueneni; ac statim Spiculum murmillonem uel quemlibet alium percussorem, cuius manu periret, requisit et nemine reperto: “ergo ego,” inquit, “nec amicum habeo nec inimicum?” procurritque, quasi praecipitaturus se in Tiberim.

48. sed reuocato rursus impetu aliquid secretioris latebrae ad colligendum animum desiderauit, et offerente Phaonte liberto suburbanum suum inter Salariam et Nomentanam uiam circa quartum miliarium, ut erat nudo pede atque tunicatus, paenulam obsoleti coloris superinduit adopertoque capite et ante faciem optento sudario equum inscendit, quattuor solis comitantibus, inter quos et Sporus erat. (2) statimque tremore terrae et fulgure aduerso pauefactus audiit e proximis castris clamorem militum et sibi aduersa et Galbae prospera ominantium, etiam ex obuiis uiatoribus quendam dicentem: “hi Neronem persequuntur,” alium sciscitantem: “ecquid in urbe noui de Nerone?” equo autem ex odore abiecti in uia cadaueris consternato, detecta facie agnitus est a quodam missicio praetoriano et salutatus. (3) ut ad deuerticulum uentum est, dimissis equis inter fruticeta ac uepres per harundineti semitam aegre nec nisi strata sub pedibus ueste ad <a>uersum uillae parietem euasit. ibi hortante eodem Phaonte, ut interim in specum egestae harenae concederet, negauit se uiuum sub terram iturum, ac parumper commoratus, dum clandestinus ad uillam introitus pararetur, aquam ex subiecta lacuna poturus manu hausit et: “haec est,” inquit, “Neronis decocta.” (4) dein diuolsa sentibus paenula traiectos surculos rasis, atque ita quadripes per angustias effossae cauernae receptus in proximam cellam decubuit super lectum modica culcita, uetere pallio strato, instructum; fameque et iterum siti interpellante panem quidem sordidum oblatum aspernatus est, aquae autem tepidae aliquantum bibit.

49. tunc uno quoque hinc inde instante ut quam primum se impendentibus contumeliis eriperet, scrobem coram fieri imperauit dimensus ad corporis sui modulum, componique simul, si qua inuenirentur, frusta marmoris et aquam simul ac ligna conferri curando mox cadaueri, flens ad singula atque identidem dictitans: “qualis artifex pereo!”

(2) Inter moras perlatos a cursore Phaonti codicillos praeripuit legitque se hostem a senatu iudicatum et quaeri, ut puniatur more maiorum, interrogauitque quale id genus esset poenae; et cum comperisset nudi hominis ceruicem inseri furcae, corpus uirgis ad necem caedi, conterritus duos pugiones, quos secum extulerat, arripuit

temptataque utriusque acie rursus condidit, causatus nondum adesse fatalem horam. (3) ac modo Sporum hortabatur ut lamentari ac plangere inciperet, modo orabat ut se aliquis ad mortem capessendam exemplo iuuaret; interdum segnitiei suam his uerbis increpabat: “uiuo deformiter, turpiter—οὐ πρόπει Νέρωνι, οὐ πρόπει—νήφειν δεῖ ἐν τοῖς τοιούτοις—ἄγε ἔγειρε σεαυτόν.” iamque equites appropinquabant, quibus praeceptum erat ut uiuum eum adtraherent. quod ut sensit, trepidanter effatus:

ἵππων μ’ ὠκυπόδων ἀμφὶ κτύπος οὔατα
βάλλει,

ferrum iugulo adegit iuuante Epaphrodito a libellis. (4) semianimisque adhuc irrumpenti centurioni et paenula ad uulnus adposita in auxilium se uenisse simulanti non aliud respondit quam: “sero” et: “haec est fides.” atque in ea uoce defecit, extantibus rigentibusque oculis usque ad horrorem formidinemque uisentium. nihil prius aut magis a comitibus exegerat quam ne potestas cuiquam capitis sui fieret, sed ut quoquo modo totus cremaretur. permisit hoc Icelus, Galbae libertus, non multo ante uinculis exolutus, in quae primo tumultu coniectus fuerat.

50. Funeratus est impensa ducentorum milium, stragulis albis auro intextis, quibus usus Kal. Ian. fuerat. reliquias Egloge et Alexandria nutrices cum Acte concubina gentili Domitiorum monumento condiderunt, quod prospicitur e campo Martio impositum colli Hortulorum. in eo monumento solium porphyretici marmoris, superstante Lunensi ara, circumsaeptum est lapide Thasio.

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NOTES

INTRODUCTION

1. L. Morrow, *The Best Year of Their Lives: Kennedy, Johnson, and Nixon in 1948* (New York, 2005), xxi.
2. *Nero* 20.1.
3. *Nero* 22.1.
4. *Tiberius* 42.1.
5. See, respectively, *Tiberius* 42.1, 57.1, and 67.2–4.
6. *Divine Julius* 79.3.
7. *Nero* 23.2.
8. *Gaius Caligula* 55.3.
9. *Nero* 19.3.
10. *Tiberius* 42.2. Suetonius says the champion drinker downed an “amphora”—a storage vessel that contained six gallons or so. Some scholars think the word here refers to a smaller jug.
11. *Nero* 20.2.
12. *Domitian* 12.2.
13. *Divine Augustus* 7.1.
14. This point is well made in a good appreciation of Suetonius by Gore Vidal titled “The Twelve Caesars,” which can be found in his *United States: Essays 1952–1992* (New York, 1993), 523–28.

IGNORE BAD OMENS . . . AND YOUR WIFE

1. The privileges listed here traditionally belonged to Rome’s gods, e.g., a *flamen* (priest).
2. By tradition, the ten tribunes elected year were supposed to protect the lives and property of Roman citizens, especially from actions by other magistrates.
3. A white ribbon was a symbol of royalty.
4. The Lupercalia was an ancient festival in which men clad only in loincloths ran through Rome. Antonius—more commonly known as Mark Antony—was widely admired for his Herculean physique.
5. A quindecimvir was one of the priests in charge of the Sibylline Books, a collection of Greek prophecies consulted in Rome during emergencies. The Parthian empire, based in modern Iran, was Rome’s major rival and in 53 B.C. inflicted a huge defeat on the Romans which Caesar now hoped to avenge.
6. Roman senators wore tunics with a broad band of purple as a mark of their status.
7. Marcus Brutus—famous from Shakespeare’s *Julius Caesar*—traced his descent back to the Lucius Brutus reputed to have driven out the last king of Rome. Decimus Brutus belonged to a different family.

8. Pompey, in the lavish theater complex he built in Rome, included a meeting space for the Senate. It must have struck the conspirators as suitable to kill Caesar in this room, which included a statue of Pompey.
9. The descendant of Capys, a Trojan, is Caesar, who traced his descent back to Troy.
10. The wren was known as the “king of birds.”
11. Marcus Brutus was not Caesar’s son, and the line, which Suetonius quotes in Greek, may be from a famous tragedy. Shakespeare has Caesar speak Latin: *et tu, Brute?*

SPEND ALL YOUR TIME AT YOUR RESORT

1. Germanicus was the wildly popular son of Tiberius’ brother Drusus, adopted in A.D. 4 by Tiberius. Tiberius’ other son was his own biological child, also named Drusus.
2. The nicknames here play on Latin words associated with drinking.
3. Presumably each of the four delicacies debated their merits in this playful work. Two hundred thousand sesterces was a great deal of money. A legionary in the army at this time had a yearly salary of 900 sesterces.
4. The female writer Elephantis authored a variety of works, including sex manuals.
5. The Latin name for Capri (*Capreae*) was similar to the word for goat: *caper*, *capri*, m.
6. Aelius Sejanus was the prefect of the Praetorian Guard. A man of towering ambition, he plotted to bring down Tiberius but in the end was outwitted by the emperor.
7. It was Tiberius’ successor Caligula, brother of Nero and Drusus, who gathered their remains, immediately after he became emperor.
8. Tiberius had withdrawn to Rhodes in 6 B.C. and did not return to Rome until A.D. 2.
9. “Pompeian” was a label applied to the opponents of Caesar and Augustus in the civil wars of the 40s and 30s B.C.
10. The red mullet was a delicacy in Rome.
11. The Gaius referred to here is now more commonly known as Caligula, a nickname meaning “Little Boots” that he acquired as an infant in his father Germanicus’ camp, where he was made to wear a miniature uniform. Thrasyllus was an astrologer Tiberius met on Rhodes and brought back to Rome and then Capri.
12. Roman villas were sometimes named for figures from mythology. Io was a priestess seduced by Zeus, much to his wife Hera’s annoyance. Some scholars believe that Suetonius wrote not *villa Iouis* but *villa Iovis*, “the Villa of Jove.”

MAKE YOUR HORSE A CONSUL

1. The quotation is from Homer (*Iliad* 2.204).
2. The Palatine Hill was where the emperors from Augustus onward resided and its name is the source of the word “palace.”
3. Agrippa, the indispensable ally of Augustus, was the father of Caligula’s mother, Agrippina the Elder.
4. In the civil wars that brought him supremacy, Augustus won major victories in Sicily in 36 B.C. and at Actium in Greece in 31 B.C.

5. The Tiberius mentioned here was the emperor Tiberius' biological grandson, known as "Tiberius Gemellus." Since Caligula was also a grandson of Tiberius, he and Gemellus were "brothers."
6. Caligula had three sisters, including Agrippina the Elder, mother of the emperor Nero.
7. In other words, Gaius gave to his sisters the spot on his dining couch that would normally be held by his wife.
8. Macro succeeded Sejanus as commander of the Praetorian Guard and together with his wife Ennia helped Caligula as he became emperor.
9. Caligula was sensitive about his own hair loss and so apparently mocked others for it.
10. The word is Greek (a language Caligula knew well).
11. The Greek town of Anticyra was famous for growing the medicinal herb hellebore.
12. Tiberius' remark "Let them hate me, so long as they accept!" was a variant on this famous line.
13. Earlier in this biography, Suetonius describes how Caligula constructed a bridge of boats across the Gulf of Puteoli near Naples, emulating the great Persian King Xerxes.
14. Suetonius means that Caligula forced prominent Romans to give up the names their ancestors had won through their exploits (Titus Manlius Torquatus, for instance, won his name after seizing the gold torque of a Gaul he dueled with). The Gnaeus Pompeius mentioned here was descended from Julius Caesar's great rival Pompeius, more familiarly known as Pompey.
15. The name meant "Big Love."
16. The King of Nemi was a priest of the goddess Diana; you got the job by killing your predecessor.
17. Gaius wore the breastplate when he paraded on his bridge of boats in emulation of Xerxes the Great.
18. Roman mortar was made with sand and lime, and so Caligula was suggesting Seneca's work was ineffective.
19. The murmilliones were heavily armed gladiators who typically fought against the Thracian gladiators favored by Caligula.
20. There were four main horse racing clubs in Rome, each named for a color.

FIDDLE WHILE ROME BURNS

1. Equestrians normally wore gold rings as insignia of their status.
2. The Neronian Games was a Greek-style festival of music and athletics established by Nero that was supposed to take place only every five years.
3. Niobe was a figure in Greek mythology. She boasted that she had more children than Leto, mother of Apollo and Artemis—which prompted Apollo and Artemis to kill all of Niobe's children.
4. Caligula also had been a supporter of the Greens.
5. The Circus Maximus was the main racetrack in Rome and could seat perhaps 250,000.
6. Suetonius describes Nero's trip to Greece in A.D. 66–67 earlier in the biography.
7. The performer was allowed only to wipe away sweat with the robe he was wearing.
8. Mithridates was the king of the Black Sea kingdom of Pontus. Rome fought him in a long series of wars in the first century B.C.

9. The Pythian crown, made of laurel, was awarded for the games held in honor of Apollo every four years at Delphi.
10. Galba was the governor of Spain who became emperor after Nero in 68 A.D.
11. Nero's biological father was Gnaeus Domitius Ahenobarbus. Nero acquired the name by which is still known when he was adopted by the emperor Claudius in A.D. 50.
12. Nero grew his hair long.
13. Romans who killed their parents were supposed to be sewn into a bag with a dog, snake, monkey, and rooster.
14. There is a pun here on the Latin word for "Gauls," *galli*, which can also mean roosters.
15. Another pun: *Vindex*—the name of Nero's challenger—also meant "defender."
16. Lares were tutelary deities widely worshipped throughout the city of Rome.
17. Sporus was a slave boy who resembled Nero's wife Poppaea. After her death, Nero castrated him and then married him. In Greek mythology, Persephone was taken to the Underworld by Hades.
18. Vows were made annually to Rome's protective deities for the safety of the emperor.
19. A quotation from Vergil's *Aeneid* (12.646).
20. This refers to a favorite drink of Nero: water boiled and then chilled in snow.
21. The quotation is from Homer (*Iliad* 10.535).

FURTHER READING

For those eager to read more of Suetonius, I recommend D. W. Hurley's translation *The Caesars* (Indianapolis, 2011). The Loeb Classical Library translation by J. C. Rolfe, now available online on the wonderful website *Lacus Curtius*, is excellent too. Robert Graves' Penguin Classics version (available in various editions) is a pleasure to read but much freer. The work of Hurley, Rolfe, and Graves alike has been very helpful to me in preparing the translation for this volume.

For more on Suetonius himself, start with A. Wallace-Hadrill, *Suetonius: The Scholar and His Caesars* (London, 1983), and then read T. Power and R. K. Gibson (eds.), *Suetonius the Biographer* (Oxford, 2014). On the development of biography see N. Hamilton, *Biography: A Brief History* (Cambridge, MA and London, 2007).

There are many good modern books on the Caesars. T. Holland's *Dynasty: The Rise and Fall of the House of Caesar* (New York, 2015) offers a lively overview of the period covered here, with a particularly vivid chapter on Caligula. Other readable studies include B. Strauss, *Ten Caesars: Roman Emperors from Augustus to Constantine* (New York, 2019); A. Goldsworthy, *Caesar: Life of a Colossus* (New Haven, 2006); P. Freeman, *Julius Caesar* (New York, 2008); B. Levick, *Tiberius the Politician* (repr. London and New York, 1999); A. A. Barrett, *Caligula: The Corruption of Power* (New Haven, 1990); A. Winterling, *Caligula: A Biography* (Berkeley, 2011); M. Griffin, *Nero: The End of A Dynasty* (New Haven, 1985); and E. Champlin, *Nero* (Cambridge, MA and London, 2003). Also recommended are G. Woolf, *Et tu, Brute?: The Murder of Caesar and Political Assassination* (London, 2007); J. Romm, *Dying Every Day: Seneca at the Court of Nero* (New York, 2014); and B. Strauss, *The Death of Caesar* (New York, 2015).

I have based the Latin text in this book on M. Ihm's Teubner edition of 1908, *De vita Caesarum libri* (Leipzig). Readers looking for the latest, and best, Latin text should use R. A. Kaster's magnificent *C. Suetoni Tranquilli de vita Caesarum libros VIII* (Oxford, 2016), along with its accompanying volume *Studies on the Text of Suetonius De vita Caesarum* (Oxford, 2016). I have followed Kaster at several points (*Tib.* 40, 52.1; *Nero* 20.2, 45.2) where his proposed reading strikes me

as a significant improvement on lhm.